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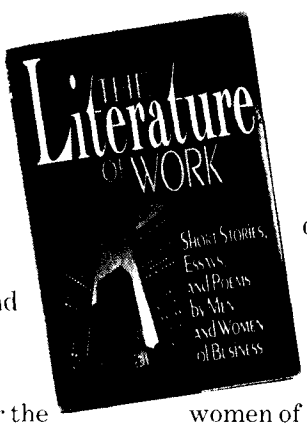

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TO OUR READERS

The Editors of THE HUDSON REVIEW are pleased to announce the appointment of Gary Krist as Advisory Editor and of John Loughery as Contributing Editor for Art.

New books by Advisory Editors of THE HUDSON REVIEW have recently been published. In accordance with our policy, the books will not be reviewed in these pages, but are listed below for the interest of our readers:

HAYDEN CARRUTH: *Collected Shorter Poems, 1946–1991.* Copper Canyon Press. $23.00; $12.00.

EMILY GROSHOLZ: *Eden.* Johns Hopkins University Press. $28.50; $11.95.

We note with great regret the death, on February 20, 1992, of William Arrowsmith, a founding editor of THE HUDSON REVIEW, who was active with the magazine in 1947 and 1948, and remained associated with it through the mid-1950s. He made an important contribution to this publication in its very earliest years.

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JAMES W. TUTTLETON

How Much Is Enough?

The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.
—William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

What goes on in our minds when we speak of the good life? A few will summon up the private continuous self-examination called for by Socrates. For others it may be adherence to God's covenant or allegiance to the *civitas Dei*. For most, judging by the adman's output, it appears to be the equivalent of a beach party, with a case of cold beer, and the slurred confidence that "it doesn't get better than this." But to a certain kind of academic sociologist, the good life is likely to be something lived in a web of institutional interconnections, in concert with others, in short, in a community.

This, at least, is the viewpoint of Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, whose co-authored study of modern institutions, *The Good Society*,[1] is unequivocal: "the individual is realized only in and through community." By their account we are not living the good life, largely because our institutions—universities, churches, capital and labor, government and law—have fallen under suspicion or into desuetude, and "the patterned ways Americans have developed for living together" are "not working well." Some of these institutions, they believe, "are not working as they were intended to. Others are having alarming and unintended consequences that affect not only people but the natural environment."

[1] The books under consideration in this review include: THE GOOD SOCIETY, by *Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton.* Alfred A. Knopf. $25.00; THE RISE OF SELFISHNESS IN AMERICA, by *James Lincoln Collier.* Oxford University Press. $24.95; THE GENTLEMAN IN AMERICA: Social Prestige and the Modern Literary Mind, by *David Castronovo.* Continuum. $24.95; BAD: Or, The Dumbing of America, by *Paul Fussell.* Summit Books. $19.00; FACING TOMORROW: What the Future Has Been, What the Future Can Be, by *Thomas Hine.* Alfred A. Knopf. $22.00.

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Doubtless the status of institutions, in America, is as problematic as Bellah and his associates suggest. We have an age-old aversion to the encroachment, on the individual, by groups. "Live free or die," says the license plate; we like to be let alone. Emerson warns us, in "Self-Reliance," that "Society everywhere is in conspiracy against the manhood of every one of its members," that the group's need for security invariably compels the surrender of an individual's liberty and, in exchange for safety, imposes on him the obligation of conformity to the group. For Emerson, the cost wasn't worth it. Others may disagree, but for Bellah and his friends, American individualism (as it derived from Locke, Emerson, and others) has subverted our very sense of community and the network of institutions that create it. For them, rapid changes in the economic, technological, and political spheres have made the argument for American self-sufficiency obsolete. They prefer a social policy grounded in an older pre-Lockean social tradition derived from biblical and civic republicanism. Their argument is thus a fundamentally moral one.

Something of the same kind of moral critique is brought to bear in James Lincoln Collier's *The Rise of Selfishness in America*. Collier sees the modern American as selfish, greedy, continually preoccupied with Number One. America, he believes, was not always that way. The older Victorian code, he argues, produced the lady and the gentleman—a social status aspired to by most Americans, whatever their social class. And to be a lady or gentleman meant to uphold social order, public decency, and service to others. A "redemptive selflessness" characterized the viewpoint of enlightened thought throughout the nineteenth century in England and America. Collier wants to know what happened to that ideal. How, he asks,

> did the United States [between 1910 and 1970] turn from a social code in which self-restraint was a cardinal virtue to one in which self-gratification is a central idea, indeed ideal? How did we erect a moral code which has at its center the needs of the self—in which self-seeking is not merely condoned but actually urged upon us by philosophers, schools, television pundits, even recent governments?

The idea of the good life as reflected in an elite of American ladies and gentlemen, who constitute the model for us of how

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to live, is, in itself, a paradox—deriving, as it does, from a European model of class relations that has no precise parallel in America. Ours has always been, at best, a "commercial aristocracy," and that fact has built into it a capacity for immense vulgarity—not to speak of great instability, as individuals and families move on an economic escalator of upward and downward social mobility. Ask Mr. and Mrs. Donald Trump. Mrs. John King Van Rensselaer, in *The Social Ladder* (1924), ruefully remarked the loss of an older European conception: "Society once connoted, first of all, family; its primary meaning at present is fortune. Years ago, it stood for breeding; now it represents, instead, self-advertisement."

In *The Gentleman in America: Social Prestige and the Modern Literary Mind*, David Castronovo traces the changing lineaments of this gentleman figure, at least as he is represented in a wide range of American novelists of manners—Edith Wharton, Henry James, Scott Fitzgerald, and John O'Hara, among others. Not surprisingly he finds that the Victorian gentleman represented by Newland Archer or the late George Apley has disappeared into strange variations "created from the everydayness of status arrangements that are at once traditional and reinvented on this continent." Conceptions of the gentleman in the literature of New England, the South, the Midwest, and (yes) even the West are here explored. Yet most of our social arrangements, as Tom Wolfe shows in *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, are still determined by money and the attendant desire to be Jay Gatsby instead of James Gatz—the Master of the Universe instead of a yuppie, or at least to be at the pinnacle of one's own social set.

Collier is aware of modern complaints against the gentlemanly ideal and the Victorian social code. He takes into account that the code was designed to be sexually repressive, to subjugate women to the patriarchy, to control the working classes, to dominate children, etc. But for him reading the nineteenth century through the lens of modern Marxism and feminism obscures what the Victorian code was all about: order and decency.

> Decency meant presenting yourself modestly, cleanly, and politely. It meant keeping a tidy home, however small and impoverished. It meant raising children to respect others, to obey the social strictures, to be polite and mannerly. And it meant, above all, restrain-

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> ing the passions, controlling the expression of the impulses: you did not fling yourself around on the dance floor, did not whoop it up in saloons or experiment with outré forms of sex.

Updating Frederick Lewis Allen's *Only Yesterday*, Collier's book is given over to an examination of the social forces that subverted the Victorian code of self-control and self-discipline. He doesn't like what he sees.

For one thing, whatever the advantages of massive immigration in the *fin de siècle*, it had the effect of introducing into American society millions of aliens who had no knowledge of Anglo-American social values and scant inducement to emulate its ideals. Moreover, as cities changed under the pressures of unplanned growth, surviving there often dictated frequent changes in one's residence and work, with attendant evils: transitory relations, a loosening of family ties, the disappearance of the sense of community itself. Moreover, it was in the city, according to Collier, that vice itself came to be institutionalized in the notorious red-light districts, which all classes frequented.

According to Collier, the Victorian code of self-restraint and decency had already crumbled by the time the Comstocks tried to substitute legal restraints (temperance and anti-obscenity laws) for self-control. And the elite was incapable of contending against the radical new ideas advanced by social thinkers who proclaimed the virtues of Woodhullian feminism, Deweyan permissive education, Freudian sexual expressiveness, Dreiserian naturalism in art, and the supposed greater appeal of the bohemian underground.

It is Collier's view that those who should have stood for values like decency and self-restraint—namely, the substantial middle class—were themselves seduced and co-opted by the young, by the avant-garde, and by their own appetites. Entertainment was the principal enticement, and show biz complied. Vaudeville, movies, radio, and TV have all adopted a supercilious attitude toward the prevailing (and successively collapsing) line of taste and moral judgment—with the effect that more and more (and more serious) offenses against decency have occurred, and gone largely unprotested.

The glorification of Flaming Youth, flappers and sheiks; of café society and slumming at the Harlem nightclubs; of bootleg whiskey and the later proliferation of grass, heroin, psychedel-

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ics, and cocaine; the stupefying adulation of the beats, hippies, rock stars, yuppies, and New Age freaks; the suggestive popular songs leading to pornographic lyrics; wild jazz dances leading to the copulative exhibitions on MTV; playboy and then playgirl sex (first sanctioned by the pill and now by school-distributed safe-sex condoms)—all of these social phenomena express, for Collier, a hedonism that erupted in the 1920s and became triumphant by the 1960s, a decade that he calls "the end of morality." The present conviction seems to be that "there are no longer any rules." Who can disagree with Norman H. Clark's observation that the present ideal is "instant, rather than delayed, gratification; indulgences and excesses rather than loyalties and responsibilities; impulse, rather than duties; the peer-directed, rather than the conscience-driven comportment"?

It would be easy to dismiss Collier as a crank moralist who wants to spoil all the fun, except that his impressive social history, massively documented by historical fact and sound scholarship, leads inevitably to the conclusion that we *have* developed a new agenda of social rights: the immediate gratification of my desire. "Meet my needs," and, as Jacqueline Susann put it, "once is not enough."

All of these authors think it timely to turn away from a claim for individual rights to an emphasis on our social responsibilities. Collier protests that he does not advocate a return to Victorian morality—although his description of the social cost of abandoning it makes it more attractive than he thinks. Yet he is convinced that

> it is nonetheless true that in many respects the America of 1815-1870 was a better society than this one. By then the great central mass of Americans was living in a social system that was predictable, stable, and basically decent. And it was so because—despite the hypocrisy—most people felt that they had duties and obligations to other people which came before their own gratification.

A social order determined by hedonistic materialists who thrust themselves forward in self-aggrandizing ways must necessarily offend the taste of anyone in touch with our public life. And there is no doubt that vulgar access to the media and the advertising industry makes it worse. In *BAD: Or, The Dumbing of*

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America, Paul Fussell itemizes what, for him, is BAD in American society. By his lights, the BAD is "something phony, clumsy, witless, untalented, vacant, or boring that many Americans can be persuaded is genuine, graceful, bright, or fascinating." He wants to be our Swiftian gadfly, and he has a little list.

Every society needs a social observer with an eye for "whatever is inflated by hyperbole and gilded with a fine coat of fraud." Society then has at least a chance of being redeemed from some of its minor follies, when its sham and pretense are exposed to purifying ridicule. It would be pleasant to report that Professor Fussell, noted author of *The Great War and Modern Memory*, is such a valuable satirist. Unfortunately, most of his instances are all too obvious and, when they are not, he is merely peevish, without being witty. Here, then, is a partial catalogue of his aversions: beepers, literary cats named Toby Belch or Ahab, girls named Dunstan or Stringfellow, creation science, astrology, vanity presses, Salt Lake City, Baptist universities, processed cheese, the use of the word "film" instead of "movie," jargon-ridden lit crit, plutographic publications like *Connoisseur*, gimmicky telephones, Elvis look-alikes, women's wrestling, and the "Oprah Winfrey Show." Enough already!

Most of the time anyone not retarded will wearily agree; occasionally one disagrees sharply. Popular toasts are usually banal, but I rather liked "To the Savior of Her Country, Mary Jo Kopechne." Fussell's taste is distinctively knee-jerk liberal and politically correct, as when he condemns as BAD "the post-Reagan atmosphere of open greed disguised as a good thing." At such times one longs for a vision that goes deeper than the stereotypes of *Wall Street* (clearly, a movie). But Fussell's are prejudices rather than convictions, and most of the time he is merely captious and arbitrary. (A more complete list of what is BAD, by the way [in my view], would include unwarranted smugness, both halves of the title of this book, and publicly announcing one's sexual proclivities in *People* magazine.)

The Good Society laments that selfishness turns means into ends. Bellah and his colleagues hold that "institutions have become corrupt," and the American people "have begun to lose trust" in political parties, the law, labor unions, the churches, and the universities. What Collier calls the triumph of selfishness Bellah et al. interpret as the exaltation of the view that

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elevates "one virtue, autonomy, as almost the only good." For them, "even autonomy depends on a particular kind of institutional structure and is not an escape from institutions altogether." They therefore undertake in their study nothing less than the creation of "an American public philosophy less trapped in the clichés of rugged individualism and more open to an invigorating, fulfilling sense of social responsibility."

The Good Society, while written for a popular audience, concludes with an appendix, addressed to specialists, declaring its theoretical orientation in respect to divergent sociological theories. It is here that the authors make their most extensive complaint against Lockean individualism—as "inadequate, though it operates in many ways as the central American value system." Unfortunately, theirs is not a rigorous philosophical examination of the limitations of Locke and his successors. They are essentially anti-individualist ideologues who call for "a new moral paradigm," to replace "the old, outworn Lockean individualist one." It is enough for them to complain "look at what individualism has gotten us," and to assert, without demonstrating, that Lockeanism is "incompatible with important elements in biblical religion and civic republicanism."

Anyone interested in biblical religion and civic republicanism as a possible (or renewable) foundation for American social philosophy will have to read their earlier book *Habits of the Heart*, with its vaguely communitarian sentiments. They regard the earlier book as having failed to re-create the socially conscious political philosophy they espouse—ostensibly because the rhetoric of the eighteenth century is "unintelligible" to Americans today. Hence, in this book, they take a different tack. Here they call for a "third democratic transformation" intended to support the social institutions that interrelate our lives. And they couch their argument in—of all things—the rhetoric of Herbert Croley, R. H. Tawney (*The Acquisitive Society*), and Walter Lippmann (*The Good Society*)—that is, in the familiar language of old-fashioned liberalism, here made a bit trendier by the occasional citation of Jürgen Habermas, philosophical voice of the German leftists.

Nowhere in this volume do the authors question the idea that, in the political sphere, Lockean Individualism has in fact triumphed. They assume that it has, because Americans have

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elected a few Republican presidents in a row. They remark that true Lockeans ought to be dismayed by "the development of large economic and governmental structures that grew 'over the heads' of citizens and beyond their control, making a mockery of the most fundamental principle of Lockean political philosophy: government by the consent of the governed." Precisely. Any serious philosophy of Individualism, deriving from Locke, will be cognate with Libertarianism or other conservatisms and therefore suspicious of a statist ideology of big government managing all features of the economy and the political bureaucracy. But is such an Individualist viewpoint reflected in our national politics? I think not. Whatever their promises, Nixon, Reagan, and Bush have not significantly downsized the central government or seriously dismantled its far-flung operations.

Despite these administrations we still have, in fact, an immense central government which, through law and regulation, reaches down into the most intimate aspects of the individual's life; it forms a vast welfare state that, from any perspective, incarnates many of the social values affirmed by Bellah and his associates. At times they seem perturbed by the immensity of this bureaucracy and call for a politics of "subsidiarity" and "generativity" that "would favor effective political initiative at the federal and state levels, backed by major commitments of money and expertise, but in the service of local and regional initiatives and institutions. . . ." But one suspects that their call for more local initiatives comes only because the central bureaucracy is too cumbersome efficiently to facilitate the old liberal agenda.

What about foreign policy? Do the authors of *The Good Society* favor the old civic republicanism ("no entangling alliances")? Do they think that American individualism, as supposedly incarnate in our foreign policy, makes for anti-idealism and selfishness? Bellah and company deny that they wish to have "a world superstate," but they would like to see us forgive Third World debts, and—since we live in "a post-industrial global order"—they want us to participate in "overlapping institutions" that would make transnational "agreements with various sanctions and enforcement powers." They remark that "Even if the measures to reduce Third World debt led to a slight decline

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in the standard of living in the United States (and it is by no means clear that this would be necessary), it does not demand heroic idealism to support them." I, for one, would rather support the rebuilding of our infrastructure and provide more hospital beds for the mentally ill who are wandering our streets, but no matter.

The fact that many such agreements are already in place undermines their complaint against an individualist foreign policy. Our participation in the International Monetary Fund, the World Court, the United Nations, and many other overlapping institutions is precisely the evidence that Individualism is *not* the motor of our politics. Far from being ungenerously individualistic, Americans through their government have supported all kinds of foreign political groups, foreign governments, and inter-governmental alliances with the intent of reducing their foreign debts, improving their economies, saving the ozone layer, preserving the oceans, and protecting outer space. We sell grain abroad at giveaway prices and, I have recently read, the federal government now proposes to make taxpayer money available to streamline the KGB and the Red Army. Yet Bellah and company wistfully argue that "we must change [our institutions] by altering their legal status and the way we think about them." No legal particulars are given, but they clearly want to effect a social agenda that, to me, is already the prevailing order of things. They mistake ineffectual public complaint against the fatuity of some of these initiatives as evidence that we are raging Individualists.

In one of their most provocative observations, the authors of *The Good Society* lament that "Economic institutions have invaded other institutions (politics, religion, family, etc.) making it harder for them to do what they were originally intended to do." This is no doubt the case, since considerations of expense—how much, where from, and to what purpose—may compromise a wide range of institutional activities. But this problem is minuscule, it seems to me, compared to the problem of the invasion of other institutions by political institutions.

Two instances will have to serve—the intrusion of politics into religion and into higher education. The chapter offered here on the mainline American churches generalizes, no doubt accurately, from the case of the United Methodist Church. This

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chapter starkly suggests to me—though not to the sociologists, who are already so politicized that they seem not overly concerned—that the marginal status of organized religion in America has much to do with the church's virtual abandonment of ultimate questions like worship, sin, and salvation. From the comments of those interviewed, these concerns are distinctly secondary to a social gospel action agenda having to do with government welfare programs, racism, feminism, gay rights, contraception, abortion, etc. Moreover, to bolster their political clout, sects have often combined into para-religious organizations, like the National Council of Churches, or the Moral Majority, to further their political ends. Often the conventions, synods, or other governing bodies are much more radical than their memberships, who like as not vote with their feet, leaving the clergy wringing their hands at the empty pews. Yet it seems unlikely that even empty churches will be able to recall a politicized ministry to its original spiritual concern with the soul.

In higher education, moreover, reams of federal, state, and city laws, regulations, and policy guidelines dictate considerations of student admission, hiring and firing of faculty, office management, the administration of grants and contracts, and even curricula. Whatever is deemed to be "politically correct"—currently the politics of affirmative action, feminism, multiculturalism, and "minority-sensitive" speech—is urged upon us as the right thing to do (and upon legislators as the legal thing to enact). Para-university organizations like The American Council of Learned Societies lobby politicians in Washington if they don't like a presidential nominee to an appointive office; and in my own field, literary studies, the Modern Language Association has hired a Washington firm of lobbyists to beat the drum for political causes that have little to do with language and literature but everything to do with exploiting the university in order to effect a broader social agenda centered on race, class, and gender. Who needs to join a political party when the Methodist Church or the MLA will do as well?

Given the triumph of selfishness, the degradation of our institutions, and the corruption of public taste, what lies ahead of us? Predicting the future, as Thomas Hine remarks in *Facing Tomorrow: What the Future Can Be*, is a fool's game. As he rightly

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remarks, none of the experts foresaw such events as the destruction of the Berlin Wall, the quick reunification of Germany, the European collapse of communism, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. As a reflection on politics and the uses of technology, Hine's work is readable, if not deep, a sensible account of "one person's attempt to think through some of the consequences of what is happening now and of what seems likely in the immediate future."

So far as technology goes, Hine is doubtless right that utopians are dangerous because they "make everyone victims, including themselves, and their destructiveness is all the more pathetic because it generally grows from good intentions." Ask the folks who used to live at Chernobyl. Acid rain, air pollution, the death of rivers and lakes, and nuclear plant disasters are all the consequence of visionaries who thought that unlimited industrial expansion, mass-produced cars, six-lane highways, the chemical treatment of our farmlands, and cheap electricity were pure benefits. Thanks to miracle drugs, dazzling surgical interventions, and greater longevity we now have a world population in the multibillions, with the unanticipated consequence of worldwide hunger, inadequate housing, and widespread joblessness. Hine's book provides a rich ground for reflection on the unforeseen consequences of what we once thought of as technological miracles.

Still, for Hine, "looking to the future is, almost by definition, an optimistic exercise." But as I reflect on his evidence and think about the future—which must include robots, artificial intelligence, instant worldwide communication, bioengineered agriculture, nuclear fission, space colonies and the like—I take it for granted that if anything can go wrong it will, and that a large number of unguessed disasters may confidently be predicted.

Hines does not want to be without visionaries, dangerous as they are: their dreams create the vision of progress. But he thinks that we have been sufficiently chastened by our recent experience to realize that limitless expansion is a delusion and that the conservation of resources is a necessity. I am moved by his faith in "guided technology" controlling our "subtle progress," by his belief in our ability to forecast the consequences of technological innovation and reject it, if it subverts our "basic

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human values." He is right that whatever future goals we define must be understood in the light of our inseparability from the physical planet and that any innovation must be based on a "sophisticated understanding of the consequences of our actions." But I am not convinced by his argument that, because of computers, we are now "able to direct technology much more precisely than we did in the past, largely because of our improved ability to measure and direct its effects." Computers are of some help in identifying patterns obscured by gigabytes of data; they help to predict some outcomes. But they do not solve the problem of human nature, which does not always behave as rationally as a computer or in harmony with a "sophisticated understanding" of the consequences of our actions.

In one of his poems, "There Are Roughly Zones," Frost remarks on the fate of a peach tree planted in a New England orchard. He doubts that it can survive the coming winter storm, there, outside the latitude in which it can flourish, and he meditates on the appetite of the farmer:

What comes over a man, is it soul or mind—
That to no limits and bounds he can stay confined?
You would say his ambition was to extend the reach
Clear to the Arctic of every living kind.
Why is his nature forever so hard to teach
That though there is no fixed line between wrong and right,
There are roughly zones whose laws must be obeyed.

He attributes this ambition to the "limitless trait in the hearts of men." Crossing the line, moving beyond the zone of the possible, *is* intrinsically human and makes for whatever progress we can claim. Yet this limitless trait also makes for overreaching, death and destruction.

How much is enough, these authors ask—enough pleasure, population, industrial capacity, petrochemical consumption, etc. Hine is convinced we are now nearing the palace of wisdom, that we have been chastened into moderation and can now control the limitless trait, our ravenous appetite. But the Texas bumper sticker tells another story about human nature: "Too Much Ain't Enough."

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HAROLD FROMM

Ecology and Ideology

Among the many variant histories of Western culture that could be produced, a social-psychological account of the images and figures created by human beings to represent themselves and their desires in a flattering light would not be a waste of time. The self-aggrandizing reality behind the spiritual pretensions of "image of God," the normatives of "Reason" in the eighteenth century and "Nature" in the nineteenth, the Marxian figure of a "Realm of Freedom" (a secular heaven to be automatically arrived at once the proletarian revolution reached its successful conclusion)—these are just some of the most well-known tropes in mankind's ideological cornucopia.

Today, with so many ideologies in ruins, a new intellectual universe known as "ecology" has emerged from the residues of these outmoded systems of belief, sometimes revitalizing the old and inspired insights, while at other times just recycling the old and benighted mistakes. As ecology has moved with urgency into the higher consciousness of Western societies, a consciousness that expresses itself in such everyday forms as energy conservation, recycling, fear of chemical and nuclear disasters, and concern about deforestation, the ozone layer, and the Greenhouse Effect, a restoration of the age-old awareness of people's connectedness with the material that produced them (i.e., the earth) has begun to take place after a long moratorium during which the Industrial Revolution made mankind seem self-creating, autonomous, and omnipotent. This awareness has permeated not just the sciences—in the form of alternate-energy engineering, plant pathology, the chemistry of waste disposal and recycling, genetic studies of toxic mutations, environmental medicine, etc.—but the humanities as well. Less known to the educated general reader are the myriad ways in which ecology has filtered through philosophy, ethics, sociology, political science, psychology, history, econom-

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ics, legal studies, religion and, even more surprisingly, literature and literary criticism. A sense of this development can readily be obtained from a sampling of titles of specialist journals born in the past twenty years: *Environmental Ethics, Environmental History Review, Capitalism/Nature/Socialism, Earth First!*; these give only the merest hint of the intellectual ferment generated by ecological awareness since the end of World War II.

What is even less popularly perceived is the extent to which ecological activities are not simply free-floating and disconnected acts to "stop pollution" (let us say) but products of larger belief-systems (both examined and unexamined) that aim to define the nature, value, and ends of life on this planet. Thus such programs as "Deep Ecology," "eco-feminism," "social ecology," to cite only the most ambitious. In a word, ecology is also philosophy, politics, theology—or to use a term more congenial to today's intelligentsia, ideology.

At the high end of the ecological conversation, we are confronted with several antinomies that roughly define the specialized subsets of the discourse: deep vs. shallow ecology, biocentrism vs. anthropocentrism, reform vs. radical ecology; and there are myriad terms that shape and shade the major positions, such as conservationist, preservationist, liberal, Leftist, bioregional, New Age, mainstream, and so forth. The temptation to place some of these terms in quotation marks is very great, since there is a tendentious, self-important, polemical, sometimes hoaxingly "metaphysical" quality about them. A lucid mini-survey of this social/philosophical ecology scene (and its bibliography is already daunting) is supplied by Steve Chase in a brief introduction to one of three remarkably interesting books of the past year that exemplify and participate in the heated debate going on within radical ecology: Dave Foreman's *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior*, Murray Bookchin's *Remaking Society*, and, with Chase's introduction, a "dialogue" between Foreman and Bookchin, *Defending the Earth.*[1]

[1] CONFESSIONS OF AN ECO-WARRIOR, by *Dave Foreman*. Harmony Books. $20.00. REMAKING SOCIETY: Pathways to a Green Future, by *Murray Bookchin*. South End Press. $10.00p. DEFENDING THE EARTH: A Dialogue Between Murray Bookchin & Dave Foreman, ed. with an introduction by *Steve Chase*. Foreword by *David Levine*. South End Press. $10.00p.

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But a few key terms need clarification. For example, although "reform ecology" sounds good, it is often used disparagingly to refer to what its enemies see as mere tinkering with the dominant capitalist, expansionist, human-oriented, wasteful Western mode of life that is destroying the planet. For some activists (like Dave Foreman), "reform" equals the "shallow" ecology of conventional left-wing politics. Organizations that many people would be inclined to admire, such as the Natural Resources Defense Council, Environmental Action, the League of Conservation Voters, and the Sierra Club, are dismissed by radicals as co-opted tools of industrialism and technology, contented to wear suits and ties and to imitate the legalistic maneuverings of their bureaucratic oppressors simply in order to change the route and speed—but not the overall direction—towards Eco-hell. "Radical ecology" (or Deep Ecology), on the other hand, wants to abandon, in varying degrees, the basic institutions—economic, political, even spiritual—that characterize Western society. Reformists are seen by radicals as "anthropocentric" rather than "biocentric" or "ecocentric." They regard the planet (radicals claim) as made for the use and pleasure of human beings no matter what the cost to other forms of life and matter that occupy the earth. Conversely, radical biocentrists find "intrinsic value" in wilderness, grizzly bears, prairies, riverbeds, and even stones, though they are apt to waffle about rats and the AIDS virus.

The aboriginal antinomy of contemporary ecology, conservation/preservation, has been described by Roderick Nash in his classic work, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, as a schism that "ran between those who defined conservation as the wise use or planned development of resources and those who have been termed preservationists, with their rejection of utilitarianism and advocacy of nature unaltered by man. Juxtaposing the needs of civilization with the spiritual and aesthetic value of wilderness, the conservation issue extended the old dialogue between pioneers [who cut down the forests as they destroyed the westward-moving frontier] and Romantics [who found God and beauty in nature unspoiled]."[2] "Wise use" and "conserva-

[2] Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, third edition (New Haven, 1982), p. 129.

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tion" are taken by biocentrists to mean a kind of benignly exploitative anthropocentrism, a planned destruction of "resources" for the benefit of Joe Sixpack hunters, motorized tourists, and middle-class human beings in general (with Theodore Roosevelt as progenitor). For biocentrists, "resources" is a dirty word, suggesting that the planet exists as a hoard of raw materials for the welfare of bourgeois mankind.

Viewed from a distance, the extremes of ecological Right and Left look something like—on the one hand—a patriarchal George Bush, willing to trash wetlands, air-quality, wilderness, energy conservation, and even people (if they are poor, Iraqi, or Anita Hill) in the interests of ruthless capitalist expansion; and—on the other hand—animal-rights terrorists who bomb laboratories and emancipate research animals; or Earth First! ecoteurs, who spike old-growth trees (to make them dangerous to fell with chainsaws) and sabotage "development," in the interests of "intrinsic value." (The story is complex, but an excellent, if tendentious, history of these movements is given in Roderick Nash's more recent book, *The Rights of Nature.*) The ideological fringes become hard to sort out, however, for a legitimate question is why animals' rights and fetuses' rights fall at opposite ends of the political spectrum instead of in the very same position.

Dave Foreman and Murray Bookchin focus very bright light on one area of the *ecological* spectrum by means of a trio of vigorously programmatic books that register the quarrel between two "radical" environmentalists who inhabit different social, philosophical, and political worlds while intersecting uneasily at a number of key points. The jacket of *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior* pictures a rough and ready, burly and forty-fivish Dave Foreman in an Earth First! T-shirt. The impression conveyed is more accurate than not, for although Foreman is a reflective person who can proffer some reasonable ideas when his mood is right, his frequently antinomian thinking is driven by the powerful emotions of an activist bent on the preservation of wilderness and biological diversity. Because the book collects essays on ecology written between 1980 and the present (the exact provenance and alterations are left unclear), there is a certain amount of growth and development, as well as inconsistency, for which Foreman makes a non-apologetic apology.

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The book opens in Foreman's most militant, absolutist, and gut-driven vein but increasingly softens as a result of criticism, FBI persecution, re-reflection, socialization, and disillusionment, so that by the time we reach the end, we are not quite sure who this "Dave Foreman" person really is. Is he a grizzly bear with a teddy bear's heart, or a teddy bear with a grizzly bear's heart? It's anybody's guess, because one of Foreman's most striking characteristics is his unremittingly revisionary narration of his own personal history in ecology, which he rewrites like crazy as each new event or philosophic encounter shakes up his universe yet again. (Confronted in debate with Murray Bookchin in *Defending the Earth*, his rewriting machine seems on the verge of breaking down altogether from dangerously high rpm's.)

Foreman worked for the Wilderness Society from 1973-80, but was gradually disaffected by its capitulations to the growing mainstream American environmental movement. Tired of compromises with federal bureaucracy, in 1980 he became one of the founders of Earth First!, a more or less "apolitical" action group that employed direct intervention (like throwing themselves in front of bulldozers) to stop environmentally destructive development, deforestation, and dam-building as well as road construction in wilderness areas. In the early chapters of his book, Foreman is at his most antinomianly biocentric, offering us New Age style inspiration as counterpoise to the entire post-Enlightenment Western Humanist tradition, which he claims to detest (for its reliance on instrumental, i.e., exploitative, Reason). This takes a lot of chutzpah and would seem doomed to failure, even if it *can* claim Aldo Leopold's "Land Ethic" as its father (an ethic which, to quote Leopold, "changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land community to plain member and citizen of it"[3]). Or as Foreman himself puts it:

> Human beings are merely one of the millions of species that have been shaped by the process of evolution for three and a half billion years. According to this view, all living beings have the same right to be here. . . . A Grizzly Bear snuffling along Pelican Creek in

[3] Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There* (New York, 1949, "Special Commemorative Edition," 1989), p. 204.

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> Yellowstone National Park with her two cubs has just as much right to life as any human has, and is far more important ecologically. All things have intrinsic value, inherent worth. Their value is not determined by what they will ring up on the cash register of the gross national product, or by whether or not they are *good*. They are good because they exist.
>
> Even more important than the individual wild creature is the wild community—the wilderness, the stream of life unimpeded by human manipulation.

Borrowing the technique of ecological sabotage called "monkeywrenching" from Edward Abbey's novel, *The Monkeywrench Gang*, Earth First! has achieved a mixed record. Not so much by saving ecosystems directly as by obtaining media attention that ultimately influenced pro-environmental legislative and judicial decisions, Earth First! made the mainstream environmental organizations (such as the Sierra Club and Natural Resources Defense Council) look more temperate and reasonable so that federal and state governments began to pay them more heed. But on the negative side, Earth First! could seem a motley band of ragtag, prankish Yippies, or misanthropic, destructive, deranged true-believers. Foreman spends much of his book outlining the group's principles and accomplishments and, it must be admitted, his revisionary account makes them appear, on balance, a positive force. "We do not engage in radical action because we are primarily motivated by opposition to authority, because we are antinomians, but because we are *for* something—the beauty, wisdom, and abundance of this living planet." But as in most of Foreman's historicizings, it is hard to tell how much is rewriting to suit the temper of the times, how much is accurate reportage.

Biocentrism, whether that of Foreman or anyone else, is a position fraught with self-contradictions and absurdities, since all life feeds on other life and no life *except the human* has any regard for the preservation of anything but itself. Biocentrists eat, drive cars, use paper, step on ants, kill bodily invaders with antibiotics, and all the rest of it; so their position, at best, becomes a question of degree that only leads to trivial side-issues, such as whose self-indulgences are the least harmful or the most virtuous—and volumes could be written on the meaning of "harmful" alone. (The only complete biocentrist

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would be a dead one, returning his elements to the earth for recycling.) The relentless need for greater and greater economic output that characterizes capitalist-industrialist Western society, a need that is destroying the planet and subverting the precise mix of elements required for life to continue, is not circumvented or even seriously addressed by extolling, as Foreman does, the lives of hunter-gatherers as "healthier, happier, and more secure than our lives today as peasants, industrial workers, or business executives," or by insisting, as many ecologists do, that the early settlers of America supplanted a native lifestyle of golden age qualities with a vicious and destructive European one. That American Indians thanked the deer and fish they killed for dinner may have been courteous (though dead is dead, whether thanked or unthanked), but it has little bearing upon any substantive biocentric virtue that would rescue us from our own high-tech depredations (and if native Americans had been allowed to multiply instead of being murdered, no amount of courtesy would have solved their own depletion of natural resources as they grew into a population as large as India's or China's or our own). While Foreman's desire for a drastically decreased population makes good sense, welcoming the AIDS virus or starvation in Ethiopia (remarks that Foreman claims have been taken out of context in order to badmouth him, but of which he is not entirely innocent), or referring to humanity as "the humanpox," only contribute to one's sense that underlying the self-satisfied virtue of biocentrism is a misanthropic elitism that regards "nature" as an aesthetic object that ought to be preserved for the pleasure of finer sensibilities. Like Aldo Leopold himself, whose highly aesthetic appreciation of flora and fauna coexisted with a love of hunting and disdain for the rabble, Foreman admits without shame to being a hunter who prefers the taste of elk, contrasting himself with the massmind "slob" hunter-murderer equipped with vulgar high-tech road vehicles, who shoots anything in sight, or "the thrill-seeking dirt bikers who terrify wildlife and scar delicate watersheds with mindless play," or the suburban family that wears fur coats or thrives on antiseptically packaged, factory-produced supermarket meat that has already been killed for their convenience. Yet dead would still be dead, no matter how exquisite the tastebuds

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(or refined the sensibility) of the hunter-killer who paradoxically insists that all life has an equal right to exist.

Foreman's aversion to the politics of both the Left and the Right is implicated in his belief that economic and social problems are less important than ecological ones and that today's bureaucratic environmentalists "must be guided by the vision of Muir, [Rosalie] Edge, [Robert] Marshall, and Leopold—not by that of the Harvard Business School." In light of the evils perpetuated by capitalist expansion, this may sound plausible, but it is a little like saying that the United States should be run according to insights derived from Wordsworth's *The Prelude* rather than by the U.S. Constitution. It is the rule of law rather than personal inspiration that has protected us so far from the horrors of Stalinism and Hitlerism. Without it, we would be totally, rather than partially, at the mercy of the Bush-Specter-Simpson-Hatch *kick their ass, gun'em down* mindset. What Foreman doesn't intuit is that ecology, even his own purist version, is one of the "human sciences," *bestowing* value on "nature" as all consciousness bestows the value it pretends to find already given in its own local culture. The "intrinsic worth" that biocentrists connect with animals, plants, and minerals is projected by the desiring human psyche in the same way that "the will of God" is projected by human vanity upon a silent universe that never says anything, let alone anything deemed valuable by all human cultures. The "biocentric" notion of "intrinsic worth" is even more narcissistically "anthropocentric" than ordinary self-interest because it hopes to achieve its ends by denying that oneself is the puppeteer-ventriloquist behind the world one perceives as valuable. But when Foreman is driven to ask whether the real world is in some way connected with our heads, his reply is "No! The real world is out there—independent, autonomous, sovereign, not ruled by human awareness. The real Grizzly is not in our heads, she is in the Big Outside—rooting, snuffling, roaming, living, *perceiving on her own.*" For him, that a certain person named Dave Foreman happens to have a fix on grizzlies (as others of us do on artworks, cars or kinky sex) has nothing to do with human subjectivity and its attribution of value. Foreman talks about natural beauty as though it were a self-presenting absolute, rather than a post-Enlightenment invention that happened to

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require subduing the wilderness and becoming bourgeois to appreciate. Indeed, Aldo Leopold himself remarked, "These wild things, I admit, had little human value until mechanization assured us of a good breakfast, and until science disclosed the drama of where they come from and how they live," and Roderick Nash refers to nature-appreciation as "a full stomach phenomenon." There are still some other cultures, as I keep reading, that do not even understand the conception of "wilderness"—which we now highly value as it disappears—because they live so completely *within* a wilderness that they have no non-wilderness with which to contrast it. "Wilderness" is *our* creation, not God's.

As his book proceeds apace, a more measured and public language begins to mute (but never eliminate) the solipsism of Foreman's biocentrism. The most rewarding chapters involve extremely knowledgeable accounts of the concrete facts behind the disappearance of America's forests and wild animals. As a hands-on environmentalist, Foreman has experienced for himself just about every habitat and ecosystem in the United States and is unrivalled in his authoritativeness about their nature and decline. His recitation of the facts is more alarming than any of the millennial outcries of his earlier pages. Even his radical view that a great deal of public land already invaded by roads and "improvements" should be returned to wilderness has a lot going for it. (The Sunday *New York Times* of November 3, 1991, devoted almost two pages to the mismanagements of the U.S. Forest Service and the depredations of clear-cutting old growth forests.)

By the last quarter of the book, in an act of supreme rewriting, Foreman expresses the awareness that even intensely held beliefs like his own are myths: "My mythology and that of my associates is Deep Ecology, or biocentrism. But no matter how valid it is, how deep it is, we must constantly acknowledge that it is still an abstraction. It is a good, workable basis by which to operate. But it is not infallible scripture." Amen.

Murray Bookchin, as passionate in his way as Foreman, comes from an altogether different tradition. If Foreman's sensibility is saturated with the values of the Southwest (he was born in Albuquerque), Bookchin is a New York intellectual in the down-to-earth yet utopian tradition of Paul Goodman. Now

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in his early seventies, with a prolific output of books, he too has been a ceaseless social activist (for more than 55 years, he reports)—latterly in Vermont with the Vermont Greens and the Institute for Social Ecology, which he cofounded in 1974, not to mention his professorial identity at Ramapo College in New Jersey. Given his extensive output and a magnum opus, *The Ecology of Freedom,* that is a dense and taxing work to get through (though Bookchin always writes well), he has made good on the suggestions of his friends that he produce a concise and accessible distillation of a lifetime's thinking. *Remaking Society: Pathways to a Green Future* is Bookchin at his best.

Bookchin's trademark term is "social ecology," with its distinctive doctrines, anarchy and anti-hierarchalism. In their working out, these ideas reveal that there are *two* Murray Bookchins: the brilliant, mordant, racy, realistic social philosopher and the pie-in-the-sky utopian idealist. The utopist focuses on the past and the future, the realist on the present. This past is a mythic pre-literate golden age (based on very questionable anthropological assumptions derived from fairly flimsy archaeological evidence) in which a non-hierarchical and non-dominating family of hunter-gatherers lives harmoniously, unmenaced by male supremacy and patriarchy, each sex having its roles and chores but with no sense of superior-inferior or dominant-servile. Land is shared and "self" unknown. "It is hard for the modern mind to appreciate that precapitalist societies identified social excellence with cooperation rather than competition; disaccumulation rather than accumulation; public service rather than private interest; the giving of gifts rather than the sale of commodities; and care and mutual aid rather than profit and rivalry." Bookchin choreographs the falling off of this primeval egalitarian society through stages involving the gradual acquisition of power, first by elders, then by males, warriors, small communities, city-states (e.g.: the Athenian *polis*) with direct representation (but slavery), and finally nation states with indirect (or no) representation, dominated by capitalist or communist power structures. This increase of hierarchy, domination, and exploitation of man by man is part and parcel of man's domination of nature; in other words, it is hierarchy not anthropocentrism that underwrites today's ecological catastrophe. But Bookchin

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realizes "there is no way that we can return to the naive egalitarianism of the preliterate world or to the democratic *polis* of classical antiquity. Nor should we want to do so. Atavism, primitivism, and attempts to recapture a distant world with drums, rattles, contrived rituals, and chants whose repetition and fantasies bring a supernatural presence into our midst" (that is, some of today's New Age earth-mother and nature-worshiping ecological regressions) won't cure our ills but merely add to them through devaluation of the human and destruction of hard-won social institutions.

What Bookchin means by "social ecology" is that ecological problems are only one aspect of a system of social domination extending from the human being/nature relationship to the person/person relationship in which both people and nature are degraded into the role of "resources" for exploitation by those on top. Ecology thus becomes a *social* science that finds hierarchical power-relations at the heart of all forms of exploitation and oppression.

In the course of tracing the movement from an imagined ideal past to an imagined ideal future, Bookchin exhibits his skill as one of the most intellectually powerful critics of contemporary society, one who sees through the cant, self-deception, and destruction involved in capitalism, Marxism, and (lamentably) certain varieties of ecology. The ruthless expansionist premise of capitalism requires that more and more forests, minerals, animals, *and people* be used to produce more and more products, many of them unnecessary, in order to keep the economy in constant growth. As a result, people are forced by exploitative and mendacious corporations—whose operating principle is "grow or die"—into humanly and ecologically destructive roles as workers and consumers. Like Foreman, Bookchin believes that any attempts to "green" capitalism are doomed, but whereas Foreman somehow advocates a retreat to wilderness, without political action—he recently left Earth First! because he saw it being taken over by leftist ideologues—Bookchin is an old-time leftist-activist (who nevertheless detests Marxism for its reduction of humanity to mindless, class-defined automata whose essence is to labor).

The big clash between Bookchin and Foreman that ended up as the public debate recorded in *Defending the Earth* came about

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in the late eighties as a result of Bookchin's vehement denunciation of biocentrism. Whereas Foreman attacks Humanism and the Enlightenment for the anthropocentric priority they give to "Reason" and human interests (as opposed to the rest of creation), Bookchin defends Enlightenment Reason (from the onslaughts of eco-feminists and wilderness freaks) as having "brought the human mind from heaven down to earth. . . . It fostered a clear-eyed secular view toward the dark mythic world that festered in feudalism, religion, and royal despotism." Furthermore, he adds, "the abuse of these ideals by industrial capitalism through the commodification and mechanization of the world does not invalidate these ideals by one whit." Since the complete abandonment of Enlightenment ideals (advocated by various extremist crazies) would entail a return to antinomian savagery (and Foreman himself, as well as some eco-feminist, animal rights, and pro-life crusaders, at times displays this primitivist, misanthropic strain), Bookchin believes that "only a dialectic that combines searching critique with social creativity can disassemble the best materials from our shattered world and bring them to the service of remaking a new one."

Seeing Deep Ecology as "spawned among well-to-do people who have been raised on a spiritual diet of Eastern cults mixed with Hollywood and Disneyland fantasies," Bookchin is scandalized by their equation of human beings with trees and stones and their reversion to primitive nature-oriented religions. He continually emphasizes that evolution has resulted in the greater and greater ability of species to direct their own subsequent development, "nor will ecological creativity be served by dropping on all fours and baying at the moon like coyotes or wolves. Human beings, no less a product of natural evolution than other mammals, have definitively entered the social world. By their very own biologically rooted mental power, they are literally *constituted* by evolution to intervene into the biosphere."

Bookchin's "ecological society" of the future would replace capitalism with a non-hierarchical "libertarian municipalism," decentralized in small towns and cities through a confederation of local governments, with direct, face-to-face representation of the population. These communities would be tailored to the local ecosystems, acquiring an energy and commodity self-

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sufficiency that would eventually eliminate the use of non-renewable fossil fuels, the extreme waste involved in shipping food and other products over long distances, and the domination over people and nature by the top levels of a power structure caught in a "grow or die" mentality. "Either we will turn to seemingly 'utopian' solutions based on decentralization, a new equilibrium with nature, and the harmonization of social relations, or we face the very real subversion of the material and natural basis for human life on the planet."

Although all three of these books are the distinctive creations of powerful personalities, Bookchin's *Remaking Society* has the aura of a classic that deserves to be treated as an essential text of social philosophy, while *Defending the Earth* provides general readers with a compressed statement, in their own voices, of *both* Foreman's and Bookchin's ideologies. Although the two debaters exhibited tact and conciliation in their public interchange (with a certain amount of Alphonsing and Gastoning), they adhered nonetheless to their wonted doctrines, creating the taut atmosphere of two lions trying hard not to bite. But in a pair of appended "Closing Essays" written a year after the public event, both spokesmen return to more uncompromising restatements of their views.

The final question, of course, is how seriously one can take Bookchin's utopian recommendations for bringing about an "ecological society." While Foreman's wilderness doctrines seem to be floating in a void of undefined social and political contexts, so that one does not understand how they mesh with any existing or projected world, Bookchin has more concretely spelled out a context for the implementation of social ecology. Both Foreman and Bookchin are certainly right about capitalism's failure or inability to deal with ecological problems until they become dire. The GNP must be expanded until the Pequod goes down into the briny deep. New attempts to drill oil in Alaska or to redefine wetlands, the latest plans for reviving nuclear power, the conflict between loggers and the spotted owl—will these assaults upon our own particular Moby Dick continue on to the bitter end, with Chernobyl heaped upon Chernobyl, war in the Gulf piled upon war in Central America? Must serious ecological reform be resisted as intractably as a market economy in Russia, because avoiding short-term pain

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takes precedence over the likelihood of more distant apocalypse? Though Bookchin's far-fetched ecotopia will never voluntarily come to pass, one is gripped by the underlying truth of its scenario and a fear that everything will suddenly come crashing down all about us (or our children), necessitating reconstructions even more drastic than he now envisions. Today it's only a sudden ozone hole over North America, unanticipated by prescient experts who saw the immediate problem as principally polar. Or it's a few thousand drownings in the Philippines as a result of rapacious and illegal clear-cutting of mountainside forests that formerly absorbed floods. Will tomorrow's catastrophic surprises make today's cry for wilderness seem like a trifling, decadent luxury?

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JAMES McCONKEY

Stories from My Life with the Other Animals

I. Americans in Italy

Two decades ago, my wife, Jean, and I and two of our sons—Jimmy, who was nine, and Cris, who was seventeen—spent a year in Italy. We lived in a spacious second-floor apartment in a villa that was surrounded by olive trees, grapevines, and hillside fields but yet was within walking distance of downtown Florence. The owners of the villa—an Italian and his English-born wife—and their children occupied most of the large sixteenth-century stone dwelling. We thought of the wife as our landlady, since she handled the business operations of the house and its land, supervising what, without any self-consciousness at all, she called its "peasants"—the couple who lived in the gate house and maintained the lawns and flower gardens, and the other couple who lived in the *casa colonica*, a farmhouse separated by a patio from the villa itself, and did the agricultural work. It was difficult to tell the age of the farming couple; the husband appeared to be considerably older than his wife, and I first mistook him to be the grandfather of his two young children.

Her many years in Italy had made our landlady, both in gestures and attitude, more Italian—or so it seemed to Jean and me—than many of the lifelong residents of Florence whom we met. When she gave us the key to our apartment, she told us that if police or other city officials paid us a call, we were to tell them that we were "exchange" visitors who paid no rent directly in money but instead were offering our house in the United States to members of her family; for she wished to avoid the municipal tax on our rent. We considered the rent remarkably modest, and were willing to pay more to cover the tax and thus to avoid any possible penalties to her. "Oh, no, no, no," she said,

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vigorously shaking her head; it was obvious that, unaware of local customs, we were impugning her skill at constructing socially expected stratagems. "The government adds fifteen percent to the regular taxes," she told us. "This is to cover cheating, which, as you can see, is therefore legal, up to a certain point. Occasionally an inspector checks our dustbins, to determine if we have any foreign renters; but he knows as well as I that Maria [she was the woman who lived in the gate house] daily burns the garbage of our renters."

She also told us that one of the villa cats, given the English name of Monster, considered our apartment his home, and would expect us to feed him. In our farmhouse in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York, dogs and cats (usually several of each species) lived with us, and on winter mornings Jean and I often woke up to find most of them snuggled up next to us; it sometimes seemed to me they had an unfair advantage over our two horses in the unheated barn we had built for them. I felt as much affection for the horses—particularly for the quarter horse, Smokey, whom we had bought when he was a colt small enough to put his head on my shoulder, as he followed me about in the paddock—as I did for the household pets, and in the earlier years of our life in that farmhouse, mature adult though I assumed myself to be, sometimes wakened on particularly cold mornings to a pleasurable fantasy that put *all* of our animals in bed with Jean and me.

During our year in Italy, our oldest son, Larry, who was a senior at Cornell, had remained at home, living in the farmhouse with other students; he had promised to care for the domestic animals as well as to feed the birds once the snows came. He was a responsible son, and had listened carefully to all my instructions—including my warning to him to fill the bird feeder with seed only around midnight, and to do it as quietly as he could. The reason for such stealth was to prevent Tammy, Smokey's stablemate, from seeing or hearing him at the bird feeder; for if she did, that mare surely would jump the top paddock rail and eat all the seed before setting off down the road. In Florence, I realized how much I missed feeding and other chores that I had sometimes considered irksome, as well as the idiosyncrasies of each of our animals; and so was glad to have a surrogate for at least our cats.

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Monster, though, never provided us with much companionship. Despite his name, he was a scrawny little animal; the name was the result of a missing ear, torn hair, scars, and continual fresh wounds. The most severe of these injuries had been inflicted upon him by his worst enemy, a vicious tomcat from the neighboring villa who claimed the territory as his own, the rest of them by the other cats who lived with our landlady and her family in a relationship quite different from the one we had with our animals. Except for the occasions on which these cats were discovered using the shelf above the kitchen cabinets for their personal bathroom and would be chased out of the house for a few minutes, they were treated with the tolerance that is another name for indifference; it was as if they were visited upon the family by a fate its members had to accept as well as they could. In consequence, the cats never to my knowledge asked for affection, never engaged in activities designed to please their owners, never showed off in the manner our cats always have. (For example, Fearless Fosdick, one of our present cats, climbs a backyard tree only while guests are sitting in the lawn chairs beneath it, and continually looks down to note their alarm or consternation as she—Fearless Fosdick is aptly named except for her sex—edges out farther and farther on a limb bending under her weight.)

Perpetually wounded pariah among cats though he might have been, Monster was as indifferent to humans as any other cat on the villa grounds. He spent his days lurking on the roof tiles, coming down only to be fed. As an Italian cat, he spurned milk or the chicken giblets Jean several times cooked for him; he had an appetite only for huge plates of spaghetti, which he preferred with cheese and tomato sauce. Whenever our cats desire milk, they alter their conventional miaow—or so it has always seemed to me—to make it approximate that English word; the only sound that ever came from Monster was a brusque but self-satisfied "ciao" after he finished his plate and headed for the door. Perhaps, in the interval between renters in which he may have scavenged upon the remains of rodents or birds left by the more aggressive cats, he had ingested parasites; in any event, several months into our stay, he began to lose his appetite, and finally died from a massive infestation of worms. (We repeatedly told our landlady that he had stopped eating his

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spaghetti, but such news led her only to that well-known Italian gesture of helplessness, a shrug accompanied by hands raised palms-up. When at last, observing herself how feeble he was, she rushed him off to a veterinarian in remorse, Monster was too far gone to be saved.)

One shouldn't generalize about the attitudes toward animals of Italians on the basis of a single family, especially a family with an English wife and mother, I know; all that I can say is that this family had a much more casual relationship with their pets than I did. Still, that casual attitude was but a step removed from the callousness of other Italians to animals outside the household, for by and large they seemed to regard them simply as objects for sport or consumption. Though the husband who lived in the farmhouse was pleased, for the sake of his children, to be given the little potted evergreen decorated with miniature lights with which we had celebrated an advance Christmas (we spent the actual holiday in Sicily), he was insensitive enough to kill a rabbit for his family's dinner by thrusting a pointed stick through its eye and into the brain while Jimmy and one of his school friends were admiring all of the rabbits he kept in cages. Apparently it never occurred to him that such a killing, accompanied by a shriek from the rabbit, might be such a psychic shock to an American nine-year-old that he would have nightmares for weeks.

And I was almost equally appalled by the slaughter of songbirds by Italian males who, unlike that peasant, were prosperous enough to afford guns and ammunition. We had taken rooms in the major hotel at Assisi—the lovely Umbrian hill town that had been home to St. Francis, famous for his love of birds and other wildlife—for the Easter weekend; at dawn on Sunday, we were awakened by a great blasting of shotguns, for just beyond our window, which overlooked the town wall and the woods beyond, the hunting hordes were mercilessly shooting at everything that peeped or fluttered. During the weeks of the migration of birds from Africa to Italy, the meat counter of the *supermercato* we patronized in Florence displayed row upon row of bits of fluff, from each of which extended a limp neck and a little head with frozen beak and lidded eyes. Shooting as they came, hunters marched through the villa groves and fields; soon the pervasive migrant melody was stilled, leaving

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only the song of the pair of nightingales that lived in the bushes by the little family chapel. Though hunters sought out nightingales as a special delicacy, our landlady said that they were apt to survive longer than other birds because at least some of them had the good sense to nest in thick shrubbery close to houses—but here, of course, the cats eventually got them.

Occasionally we had dinner at Omero's, a restaurant on our side of the Arno; it was on the crest of a hill not far from the Torre del Gallo, where Galileo built his telescope and made his astronomical observations. To provide guests with a fine vista of Florence and the Arno valley, the proprietor had put the dining room in the rear of the building; diners entered the restaurant through a storeroom door, making a passage beneath the cured hams and other meats hanging from ceiling hooks. Remote from the conventional tourist routes, Omero's served good food at reasonable prices and attracted (we were told) young actors, artists, and clothing designers—something that seemed to us probably true, since a majority of the diners were in their twenties or thirties, many of them fashionably dressed, and nearly all of them wore dark glasses even at night.

One evening at Omero's, we had a misunderstanding with our waiter that, while based on language, surely was connected with a difference in cultural assumptions about animals. Nobody in our family could finish the unusually generous servings; enough remained on our plates to provide us with a meal at home the following day. Did we have the temerity to ask our waiter to put it in a container? In America one asks for a doggie bag, and I thought such a euphemism might be customary in much of the world—and certainly would be understood at a restaurant like Omero's.

As our waiter, who spoke some English, cleared the table for dessert, I asked him if we could have a doggie bag. "*Che cosa?*" he asked, puzzled. I was the only member of my family not studying Italian at one school or another. Cris, who was enrolled in several classes at the British Institute, was farther along in the language than was Jean, who took a class in Italian for foreigners at the University of Florence, or Jimmy, a student at a day school for American children.

"*Un saco,*" Cris said, pointing to the food on each of our plates. The waiter remained bewildered. "*Non capisco,*" he said.

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"*Per il cane,*" Cris said.

"*Un saco per il cane*?" The phrase obviously made no sense to him.

While the waiter watched intently, Cris went through a pantomime: he opened an invisible bag and, lifting first one plate and then another, pretended to push food into it with a knife.

"*Capisco,*" the waiter cried, striking his brow with his hand as illumination came.

At first, it wasn't clear to us what that insight consisted of, since he didn't give us a doggie bag with the check. Perhaps, in Italy, domestic animals are unlikely to be treated as members of the family, and who could think that a bag for the dog could really be intended for people? The waiter must have assumed that we had gone into animal husbandry in a big American way on a Tuscan estate; for, as we were preparing to enter our car, he staggered out of the restaurant after us with two huge plastic bags filled with the day's kitchen scrapings. He smiled so radiantly for being of such assistance to us in providing food for our pigs or other farm animals if not for a kennel filled with ravenous hunting dogs that I couldn't tell him we didn't want all that garbage, and not even Cris had the facility with the language to explain that Maria, the gatekeeper's wife, would be furious with us for making her build a fire huge enough to incinerate all of those scrapings in order to prevent the officials from arresting our landlady for renting out her villa to a horde of tourists without paying the proper tax.

As it was, I opened the trunk, and would have helped him lift the bags into it had he not waved me off; I even offered him an additional tip, which he—possessor of an Italian generosity of soul—refused. Hoping to find a rubbish bin into which we might furtively dispose of our garbage, I drove slowly back to our villa; but Italians are too canny to leave any such receptacles near the curb. For several days, dark smoke rose from the hidden area where Maria burned our garbage; though she was normally a friendly woman, she muttered and shook her head when I encountered her by our door, and it was a week or two before she again smiled and waved at us as we passed the gate house.

In general, Italians are a warm-hearted people, the men as

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well as the women showing an understanding of, and affection for, anybody's babies and young children that far exceeds my own. But I met only two Italians who treated their domestic animals as comrades; these Italians seemed like Americans, and their example made me yearn for home. During that year-long residency in Florence, I became conscious for the first time in my life that the value I found in animals was part of the particular culture I had been born into.

II. My Bird

The eleventh edition of *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, one that humanists value over subsequent editions for its subjective judgments on all sorts of quirky topics, says of the mockingbird (a native American species) that while there is little about the bird's physical appearance "beyond its graceful form to recommend it," its melody possesses "a varied range and liquid fullness of tone that are unequalled, according to its admirers, even by those of the nightingale."

Several years after our return from Florence, a pair of mockingbirds made a journey farther north and west than is customary for the species to nest in foliage near our house. In the mornings, the male would perch on the chimney serving the Franklin stove in my study, his melody coming down the flue to resonate in the metal belly of that stove. Later in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article, the author proves himself to be one of the bird's admirers by saying outright that its melody far surpasses that of "its European rival," a judgment that struck me as wholly true, as I compared the song of *my* mockingbird with that of the nightingale cock in Italy, whose melancholic gurglings had seemed to me an acknowledgment of impending demise. While plagiarizing at will from the work of others in the manner of all self-confident artists, my bird, through improvisation and surprising combinations, ended up with compositions totally his own. By making not the nightingale's but the mockingbird's melody a metaphor for the creative faculty, I put myself one up on Keats. I came to expect that morning serenade, which gave me the emotional kick—and more than that, the hubris—I needed for the day's work.

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But one morning the melody stopped. On the front porch, I discovered my favorite cat, Lucifer, sitting next to the gift offering she had left me—the severed head of my favorite bird. She ceased being my favorite cat at that instant. I chased that cat around the house maybe three times, vainly burrowing after her into the bushes. For the remainder of that long summer, the surviving mate spent her hours on the back yard power line, singing over and over a dirge—several notes, monotonously repeated, that drifted into my study through the open window. "Damn you, listen to that," I cried to Lucifer, whenever she stood at the study door in a cautious test of the emotional waters within.

My work at the desk most of the summer was not very productive. It occurred to me, one sultry afternoon, that the casual or indifferent attitude of Italians toward animals is in some ways preferable to my own attempt at a more intimate kinship. Such an insight didn't grant me an Italian insouciance toward cats, but it did permit me to welcome Lucifer back into the good graces of the family and to get on with the task at hand.

III. Anthropomorphism

Some months back, my local newspaper, *The Ithaca Journal*, carried a feature story about a Cornell veterinarian who specializes in animal behavior. According to that article, she often finds the key to a pet's behavior problem in its owner. While animals share with humans such emotions as "fear, courage, trust, love, hatred, aggression," humans and their pets may have different responses to any given situation. She is quoted as saying that veterinarians in the animal behavior clinic at Cornell "try to look at the way an animal interacts with its owner," and frequently discover that owners "are anthropomorphic, meaning they try to give their animals the same values they have."

The observation seems unexceptional: you need to find out the reason that a cat pisses on the rug instead of getting angry at it for doing something you don't, even as you shouldn't expect a cat to know that the bird it killed was a metaphor to you. As an owner of pets for more than sixty years, though, I

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think the comment implies too sweeping an indictment of anthropomorphism. Perhaps because of an early incident that led to a bonding between animal and owner, some pets seem to *want* to be considered human. Animals and humans have the same biological drives; animals are simply more transparent in demonstrating them. (Scoldings, threats, strong ropes, and even locked doors failed to keep Ben, an Irish setter my family once owned, from consummation of his sexual desires; on one occasion, he dug out a large foundation stone to reach a neighbor's bitch locked in the basement, on another he leaped with virile abandon through an expensive stained glass window of a house a mile from his own. When an official of the S.P.C.A. recommended castration, I felt a pain in my own testicles.)

Furthermore, I believe that an animal and a human sometimes do share identical attitudes toward an experience; that the animal can communicate such attitudes to a person through intimate eye contact as well as through body language; and that, once expressed, those attitudes can form the basis of a lifetime of understanding between the pair. As best as I can describe in words a communication that is wholly visual, the intelligence that passes from animal to human is based on humor and tolerance; it is as if the animal understands that he and his human companion are engaged in a friendly conspiracy.

Until Tammy, his beloved stablemate, died of old age, Smokey (wall-eyed though horses are) frequently communicated that sort of message to me. As a mischievous young horse, Smokey acted as if he intended to bite my arm whenever I slipped a rubber pail of grain under the bottom rail of his stall; to outwit him, I would pretend to put it in the stall, and as he came for the grain (or my flesh) I would quickly place the bucket in the space outside the stall. My strategy became part of a game we played together: he would warily wait between the two possible positions, while I made a feint with the bucket toward one or the other. But would he really bite me if I left my arm exposed as he rushed toward the bucket, baring his great teeth? One morning, after engaging in the customary feints, I left my arm in a vulnerable position, just above the bucket. He bared his teeth—and, after delicately nipping my skin, nuzzled my arm and then licked it with his leathery tongue. Before

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bending his head into the grain bucket, he gave me for the first time that friendly and conspiratorial look.

Tammy died in the neighboring stall one day. She weighed half a ton; it took a couple of pulleys attached to barn beams and a winch-equipped truck to remove the body. Jean and I managed to entice the nervous Smokey into the pasture, shutting the gate connecting it with the paddock and barn and covering the fence with blankets, in a vain attempt to keep him from seeing the body being slowly dragged toward the truck. Despite such tactics, Smokey held me accountable for the loss. Before the death, he would whinny when I approached the paddock with a carrot or apple. After Tammy's body was trucked away, he not only didn't whinny, he refused to take the food. He even turned his head away: he simply would not look at me. A year passed before he would accept anything from my hand. But our games belong wholly to the past, and his eyes now tell me nothing at all.

Were Smokey and I to have a consultation with the animal behaviorist at the Cornell clinic because of my complaint that my old horse no longer communicates with me, she might consider me an egregious example of anthropomorphism. Is it possible that all along I only imagined an intelligent, if purely visual, understanding between Smokey and me that had formed the basis of a relationship? Had I only imagined that now and then I had seen the same look of conspiratorial friendship in nearly all the animals I've known since childhood? Like a trust in God or in the unity underlying everything in the phenomenal universe, one's belief in such a matter resists conclusive proof. I can only say that whenever I see that look, my memory carries me back to an incident in my childhood that—at least for me—validates its truth.

In this memory, I am eleven years old, lying on my stomach outside the side door of a marvelous house in a new addition—called Normandy by its developers—of Little Rock; recently, my father, a traveling salesman, has deserted my mother, my brother, and me for a widow in San Antonio. It is a sunny day of a long summer during one of the years of the Great Depression, and my father has sent us too little money. Soon the three of us and my dog—a black German shepherd named Bruin by my mother, since as a puppy he resembled a bear

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cub—will have to leave that house, which is being repossessed, to drive a thousand miles north, where we will arrive, without advance warning, at the home of some relatives. Bruin was my father's last gift to me before his betrayal of his family.

The ground is pleasantly warm on my belly on this day. Bruin is standing above me, ready for a little game we play that always makes my mother angry at both of us, for it often ends up with a rip in my pants that she will have to mend. It's not much of a game, really: I give a little ass-wiggle, and Bruin—already an unusually large and strong dog, even for a German shepherd—attempts to lift me up by the seat of my pants. On this occasion, I give the customary sign and he obediently tugs at my pants. Suddenly, though, he lets me drop and assumes an innocent sitting posture at my side. I look up to see my mother's face above us, at the kitchen window. Apparently sharp-eyed Bruin has seen her before she has noticed what we have been up to; instead of scolding us, she smiles and waves. I sit up, facing Bruin; his eyes are friendly and intelligent, full of the knowledge of our conspiracy. To share such a secret with a loyal companion gives me great happiness: it is happiness of the sort I imagine I would feel if, waking in the middle of the night, I heard my father's car once more turning into the driveway.

Whatever anthropomorphism I can be accused of has its source in this moment.

IV. Goats as a Test of Human Character

Larry, who is forty, and my namesake Jim, who is thirty, both live in New York City, where both are employed in film; Cris, the middle son, now works at Cornell, as do Jean and I, and shares the large farmhouse with us. Cris returned home a number of years ago because we had fields available for the six goats he had just purchased—the nucleus of a herd he needed for the goat milk and cheese he hoped to produce. At the time he was working the night shift at Morse Chain in Ithaca, and dreaming of a more pastoral vocation. The goat barn that he built, one with a milking parlor and a large processing room as well as eating and sleeping quarters for the forty-odd goats he ultimately owned, now stands vacant, at the far end of the

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grassy field that constitutes our back yard; for the financial returns from that enterprise were never enough to allow him to quit his factory job, and the dairy work was too time-consuming to permit him to continue with it while holding down a full-time job.

Goats may not have memories as long-lasting and detailed as those of horses, who remember not only deaths but something as mundane as a random route they once were directed to take through a woods; nevertheless, goats are more canny in their utilization of past experiences. As a two-year-old, Smokey felt the sting of the electric fence surrounding his pasture, and consequently he has never attempted to get beyond that barrier, though the charger has been disconnected for maybe a decade; on the other hand, Cris's goats soon figured out that the electricity pulsed through the wires, and scrambled at will through the fence in the interval between pulses. Within a week of the arrival of the first goats, we lost to them a small orchard of young apple trees which just were beginning to bear their first fruit; within the month we lost the long row of lilac bushes bordering the farm road leading to our barns and the old apple orchard—now mainly taken over by walnuts—beyond. Today, two blue spruces in the back yard still carry the hourglass shape sculpted into them by goats standing on their hind legs to browse upon the succulent branches.

But goats—especially the kids—are endearing creatures, and their damage never vexed Jean or me very long. Not even Cris, whatever his labor and ultimate disappointment, regretted the four years that goats shared our lives as well as our efforts at landscaping. One winter eleven kids were born, and the barn, despite heat lamps, was so cold that early each morning Cris, whose shift ended at midnight, brought two or three into the house, sometimes after assisting the mother in a particularly difficult birth. We kept them in the kitchen, the only room with a linoleum floor. At 7:00 A.M., while Cris slept, Jean and I fed them with nursing bottles and then watched them frolic about the room for half an hour or so before we put them back into a makeshift pen in the corner of the room and mopped up the floor.

Cris developed an affection toward his herd, including a love for its littler creatures; but anybody who raises goats—or cows,

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for that matter—as part of a dairy operation would be incapable of continuing were he or she to impart to them human attributes. By and large, male kids are economically useless and must be slaughtered; insufficiently productive females must be culled from the herd. Because the milk is intended for sale or for the production of cheeses, kids must be immediately taken from their mothers and weaned to a bottle: once they get nourishment from the udder, it is difficult to convince them to suckle from a nursing bottle containing a milk replacement. Even the first fluid from the udder—the protection-giving colostrum—must be given by bottle.

Cris learned much about goat husbandry from three veteran goat raisers. He bought his initial goats from a locally-famous psychic or witch whose hands had become too arthritic for her to continue milking, and soon he became a friend of a long-married couple from Colombia who had bought a small farm overlooking Ithaca for the purpose of operating a large-scale goat dairy—eventually they had a herd of over two hundred animals. On the basis of my own limited experience with these three people, I decided that goat raisers are unusual people. The psychic had a confidence in her occult powers to abet her handling of animals as well as humans. ("Did you do that?" her husband asked her in anger, on the night that the television set, a source of controversy between them, blew up. She told me about this incident—leaving her husband's question unanswered—on a hot Sunday afternoon as she was using the forked branch of a sapling to find us a new water supply, since our well had proved inadequate to the thirst of Cris's growing herd: a well drilled at the spot she indicated hit an underground, if slightly sulfurous, Mississippi.) Though they were in their seventies, the Colombian couple still practiced yoga, and often were standing on their heads on those early mornings that Cris arrived with a problem about goats.

Successful goat raisers obviously were able to combine attachment with non-attachment, subjectivity with objectivity, affection with a businesslike attitude—a mental approach that seemed to combine Italian attitudes toward animals with my own, and that, whatever its metaphysical catalyst, was the only practical way to handle creatures that are cunning in both senses of the word. Cris had the required intuitive knack. Still,

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he continually told me, as if in reminder to himself, that to avoid hassle and heartbreak with animals, you simply *couldn't* consider them to be like people—advice similar to that later offered by the animal behaviorist at Cornell.

Only once, to my knowledge, did he violate that injunction, and it came near the end of his dairy enterprise, in a moment of exhaustion. How does one whose hours are limited find the time and the energy to milk goats and market that milk, to experiment with methods of making various exotic cheeses, to treat the ailments of the herd, to serve as midwife during difficult births? In his attempt to cope, Cris for a time brought a partner into the business, a young woman who took over the milking as well as the decisions concerning which goats to keep, and in addition hired a part-time helper, an exceptionally gentle young man. On a Saturday night in early spring, several kids were born, with Cris and his helper in attendance. At midnight, as Jean and I were preparing for bed, Cris ran into the house in great distress, shouting, "I just injured a kid!"

Cornell has clinics for both large and small animals; "large," though, includes all livestock, and so its veterinarians treat sheep and goats as well as horses and cows and an occasional lion or elephant. Cris called the large animal clinic's emergency number. None of the veterinarians who had treated his goats in the past was on duty that night, but Cris was known and liked by them. The call was transferred to the home of one of the goat specialists, and he agreed to be waiting at the clinic when Cris arrived with the newborn kid.

After he made the call, Cris told us what had happened. He and his helper were trying to get the kids to nurse from bottles. While his back was turned, his helper—whose kid was resisting the plastic nipple—decided it was in their mutual welfare to let it nurse in the way intended by nature. Cris took the kid from the mother, and for half an hour tried unsuccessfully to coax it to take the colostrum from the bottle. Finally, in frustration with his helper, the kid, and perhaps the whole bloody business, he roughly shoved the kid from his lap. It hit the wall, and couldn't walk. Perhaps its hindquarters were paralyzed, perhaps there was a spinal injury.

Most of us have felt such impulses; with our own children, we resist them as best we can. In his remorse, Cris had exaggerated

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both his violence and the injury; the kid was not seriously hurt. Actually, the event provided me with one of the most emotionally rewarding moments in my experience. I accompanied Cris in his pickup truck to the clinic, holding on my lap the cardboard box whch contained the kid and the soft rags cushioning it against bumps. A mixture of rain and soft snow was falling, making it hard to see. The doors of the clinic were immense enough to permit the entry of the largest truck. Inside, it seemed a gigantic and immaculate barn, brightly illuminated. For some reason, a veterinarian, his white coat stained with blood or manure, was marching a cow back and forth. A blue-jeaned young woman was sleeping on some hay outside a stall; apparently the crisis with her horse was over, for the animal was peacefully munching. From another stall, a bull gazed at us. He was as immobile as the bronze memorial statue of a horse enclosed by a fence I once had seen in a Kentucky pasture.

Cris's veterinarian, a slender man in his middle years who had donned a freshly laundered white coat, watched us approach down the major aisle, which, lined by the stalls and with the roof trusses above, reminded me of a cathedral nave. Cris put the little box at his feet. The veterinarian bent over the kid, lifting it from the box to observe its attempt to walk. He gently probed the animal's hindquarters with his fingers. Only one rear leg now seemed to drag, and the kid was able to put weight even on that one.

"What happened?" the veterinarian asked.

Cris said, "She wouldn't suckle from the bottle. I got angry, and threw her against the wall."

If I had been in my son's position, I would have prefaced that confession with all the extenuating circumstances I could think of. It's possible I might even have lied, saying, Maybe a horse stepped on it, or I just don't know what happened. The veterinarian looked at Cris, his eyes (I thought) unusually kind.

"That kind of thing happens more often than you probably realize," he said. "Your kid is luckier than most; it was just a minor dislocation, and the joint's back in place."

I was astonished. "You fixed it, that fast?"

"As you can see, it wasn't much of a problem," the veterinarian said. "By tomorrow the limp should be gone."

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A smiling, gray-haired woman encountered us just outside the clinic door. Despite the hour, she had come to see the progress of some animal of hers—a cow or a sheep. Cris had dispensed with the box, and was holding the kid in his arms. The outside floodlight illuminated all of us, and the falling snow as well. "What a cute kid!" the woman exclaimed, fondling its ears. And to me she said, "Your jacket is so handsome!" It was made of a beige-colored plastic and had a rip under one arm; I had bought it long ago at Woolworth's. But the wet plastic did look attractive in the glow of the floodlight, and I've remembered the praise of that jacket as a kind of benediction—as if I were an aging father and maybe grandparent who had been blessed in an unusual way.

V. Spiritual Love

In my childhood, the stars and planets burned much more brightly in the night sky than they do now. Atmospheric pollution accounts for much, but not all, of the difference, for some of it is subjective. When I was eight or nine, my parents bought for me and my older brother, Jack, a children's encyclopedia, *Our Wonder World*, that contained many conundrums, examples of word play, and the like; among the many illustrations were the first large photographs I had seen of star clusters and of planets in our solar system. In Little Rock during that first summer of my father's departure, I was fascinated by those photographs and by the text that accompanied them; as evening came on, Bruin and I would lie together on the lawn of that house in Normandy we were destined to leave, and I would tell him about the Martian canals, the moons of Jupiter, the rings around Saturn, the speed of light, and the nature of the universe. Whether he ever saw the Milky Way, I don't know; but on occasions he obediently looked skyward, and I could see unknown stars reflected in his dark eyes.

I've heard it said of passionate love that it is narcissistic; that is to say, the lover does not see the beloved as she or he truly is, but as a mirror of the lover's own spiritual desires, as a manifestation of idealistic yearnings. To discover an analogy between the love potion that drew Tristan to Iseult in doomed

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passion and the moment of shared understanding that linked me to Bruin may be an absurd reduction of a major myth of Western civilization, but my delusion was at least of the same kind as Tristan's: grand animal though he was, Bruin for me became more than an animal or human can ever be. My anthropomorphic error was not one of imputing my own responses to him, but of making him a representation of an ideal beyond my grasp—something perhaps rationally less difficult to do with an animal than with a person, which may account for the deification of animals in early cultures, not only in Egypt but throughout a human world still in close contact with a natural one.

Our attitudes toward animals change with our own altering views toward much else, and mine have changed with the inevitable ebbing of the once insatiable wanting that sometimes makes an unholy—and perhaps uniquely American—trinity of soul, sex, and possessions. For decades, though, Bruin reigned as such a major myth figure in my personal animal kingdom that I wanted any new animal to be as much like him as possible. The dog that we currently own, a black Labrador retriever–German shepherd mix named Gandolf, was a gift from Cris's former goat partner, who was leaving Ithaca for California. When the dog was offered to us by telephone, I said I probably didn't want it, but upon seeing Gandy, I immediately decided that we should take her—simply because her ears, when she raised them in alert attention, were black sails identical to those of Bruin, dead for fifty years.

After my mother, brother, and I had to leave Normandy, I feared I might be forced to give up Bruin. My mother's sister and her husband took us into their home in Lakewood, Ohio, and allowed the dog to sleep in the basement. I punished his every indiscretion, not only out of fear that his misbehavior might cause his exile, but also because such misbehavior was not in keeping with the expectations of my love. Once, by a confectionary store at the corner of Madison and McKinley Avenues, Bruin picked a fight with a much smaller dog, and I hit him so severely that a woman stopped her car to shout at me, "If you strike that magnificent animal one more time, I'll call the police!" Her accusation of brutality shocked me, for it was nothing but love that had made me treat him like that. *She*

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didn't know that in Little Rock I had protected Bruin from exhaustion by keeping him in the house whenever I knew my brother intended to practice with golf clubs or rifle, for Bruin was ever eager to retrieve objects, and his hearing and eyesight were so acute that he could return with every golf ball, and once (my brother said) even found the tree in which a bullet was embedded. Nor did that woman know that Bruin would never repeat a transgression I had punished him for. In Arkansas, while we were companions on a long walk, Bruin had outraged me by killing a chicken. He saw a flock of chickens in an unfenced yard, sent them into a frenzy by rushing at them before I could tell him to stop, and shook one dead in his mouth. He dropped the corpse during my homeward pursuit of him. I hit and scolded him before locking him in the garage, and withheld his supper. Subsequently, whenever we passed the yard with the chickens, he crossed to the other side of the street, to be as far from temptation as he could get.

In my fifteenth year, my mother and I accompanied my brother to Flint, Michigan, for he had been admitted to General Motors Institute, where students could earn an engineering degree while getting practical experience as well as a salary by working in one of the numerous General Motors plants then located in Flint. The only apartment we could afford was on the second floor of a downtown house whose landlady forbade pets. My father's sister and her husband, who lived in Westerville, Ohio, agreed to take Bruin. My brother made a sturdy wooden box in accordance with Railway Express instructions; but it was I who betrayed Bruin by coaxing him into it. He gave me a pleading look, but obeyed me. "Now, go get the form from your mother so we can leave," one of the two Railway Express employees said to me. "What form?" the other one asked; I knew from the question that it was a kindly ruse to keep me from seeing a boxed and frightened Bruin being lifted into the truck. I stood at the hall window by the staircase leading to our apartment long after the truck disappeared.

When my uncle and aunt picked up Bruin at the Railway Express office—they had to come for him, for the company refused to deliver him by truck—they found a snarling and dehydrated animal whose box was plastered with cautionary signs: apparently he had bitten a handler en route, and

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afterwards was not given either food or water. As I knew from their letters, my relatives grew to respect Bruin's intelligence and bravery. The most remarkable instance of these was his rescue of the neighbor's dog, a small female, that had fallen into a creek swollen by the spring rains. My uncle wrote that Bruin saved her by jumping into the torrent, grabbing her by the neck fur, and swimming with her to safety. That sounded like a fictional exploit in a novel about Lassie: could it really be true? Yes, since Bruin, my admirable dog, was the savior. But Bruin, through this exploit and others, became my uncle's admirable dog.

I was to see him again only once, and not until he was old and I a college junior. My uncle and aunt had moved to a suburb of Akron, and I was visiting them in their new home. My uncle was away on a trip the day I came, and Bruin and my aunt met me at the door of a tidy two-story house. Bruin's ears were up, the two black sails separated by puzzled furrows of fur. He didn't wag his tail as I stroked him. Suddenly, though, he embarrassed me by sniffing vigorously at my buttocks. Excretory odors are agents of memory in dogs, no doubt for Odysseus' Argus as well as my childhood companion, though it is a detail that Homer ignores. At the instant of recognition, Bruin—how it delighted me!—leaped at me to lick my face; unable to contain his happiness, he jumped on the coffee table, upsetting all the glass objects on it. He ran through the dining room and kitchen, circling back to leap at me again, and then up the stairs, where he jumped on or over the beds, tables, and chairs in every room. My aunt and I followed him upstairs as quickly as we could—to prevent further damage, I suppose, but also just to see the antic behavior. We laughed until we embraced each other, crying.

Six months later, Bruin died. In his letter telling me of the death, my uncle said he had a worrisome feeling that a nutritional lack might have caused it; he and my aunt hadn't been able to afford more than a can of dog food each day, to supplement table scraps. I suppose he as well as I never really thought about the fact that Bruin would die: you come to expect immortality from a dog like that, and feel a personal responsibility when the animal proves as mortal as you. It was in keeping with the narcissism of my old love for him that I

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wondered if he had died because, having been so joyously reunited with me, he felt once again betrayed, this time by my return to college. But Bruin was eleven, my age when my father gave him to me; and at eleven a large dog has lived his normal span.

In recent years, conscious of a diminution of my spiritual powers, I have remembered again and again a passage in an essay on old age by Francis Bacon: "A certain rabbin, upon the text, 'Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams,' inferreth that young men are admitted nearer to God than old." At sixty-nine, I know that the soul is a name for our unobtainable desires, and that as a child I made of Bruin a repository of a vast wanting that included my absent father but went beyond that to reach the stars—a mighty wish to reach a spiritual truth beyond my limited self, one that could end my isolation by merging me with the natural world and the mysteries of the universe.

Over the decades, I dispersed the qualities I associated with Bruin to every animal that came into my household until little was left to give away, other than the alert nobility of his black ears. To recall the strength of a childhood wanting makes me nostalgic for it, but its loss probably has made me gentler with my animals.

VI. Wrath

When Gandy entered our household, she immediately became friendly with another black animal, a female cat missing a front leg whose name, ironically enough, was Grabber. She had been given that name by Cris's goat dairy partner, who had gone to the S.P.C.A. shelter with Cris in search of a barn cat. The kitten had actually chosen them, by reaching through the bars of the cage to grab the partner's sleeve as she and Cris passed by. Following the collapse of the dairy enterprise, Grabber became a house cat that I fed. For three days, including one that was the coldest of the winter, she was absent from home. She came back at last, one of her front legs hurt so badly that it became gangrenous. The veterinarian who finally amputated it—for several days Cris massaged the leg in warm

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water in a vain attempt to return the blood circulation—said the injury had been inflicted by an animal trap.

Given Grabber's new vulnerability, her ready trust of a strange animal—so much larger than she, and a member of a frequently hostile species—surprised and gratified Jean and Cris and me. Gandy, though, is an unusually gentle creature, and at first probably felt an insecurity within an environment still alien to her, so perhaps from the beginning a mutual need led them to sleep together on the carpet of the downstairs bathroom. Waking at 2:00 or 3:00 A.M., Jean and I could see in the glow of the bathroom nightlight the cat curled up against the warm belly of the dog. Gandy didn't seem to sleep as soundly as Grabber; if we stirred in bed, she would thump her tail, without moving the rest of her body. It was as if she remained as alert as possible, in protection of her smaller, three-legged friend—though in thinking that I probably am giving the dog some feelings of my own.

I have always detested the use of steel traps to capture animals, and it angered me not only that somebody had set one or more of them, without permission, somewhere on our farmlands, which extend a half mile in nearly every direction from our house, but would permit an animal caught in a trap to suffer there for as many days as our cat obviously had. In the days and weeks after the amputation, Cris and I searched fruitlessly for traps on the property. Just before dawn one spring morning, I stepped over the sleeping pair to get to the toilet. As I was returning to bed, I remembered a newspaper report that a comet would be visible before sunrise that day, and so I put on a bathrobe, got the binoculars from the bookcase beneath the window that faces the bird feeder, and went to the glassed-in porch to have a look. But instead of focussing on the tiny golden smudge in the eastern sky, I used the binoculars to magnify a rusty pickup truck parked a quarter mile down the road, near the hedgerow that marks a stream meandering through our fields, just as its owner emerged from the hedgerow, a limp muskrat in each hand.

Without taking time to throw on any clothing under my bathrobe, I grabbed my car keys, ran to the car, and sent the gravel flying as I backed out of the driveway. The trapper, having figured out I was the owner of the property he was

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poaching upon, and maybe sensing from my speed a murderous intent, jumped into his pickup and took off. Ignoring the stop sign, he spun his truck left at the dangerous intersection with the state highway, and I did the same with my little Horizon. Apparently his instinct was to make it home, as if he would find safety there; he braked so suddenly for his driveway I almost crashed into his rear bumper. He was out of his truck and running for his door as I jumped from my car, shouting, "Stop! Stop right where you are!", a command that he instantly obeyed.

Rage made me incoherent, and nearly blind. I told him he had caught God knows how many of my dogs in his vicious traps (an exaggerated and maybe wholly untrue indictment: two of our dogs in recent years had limped home with leg wounds less severe than Grabber's) and had caused my cat to lose her leg, and what ever had given him the cruelty to trespass on my land? Gradually, I saw him for what he was: a frail man considerably older than I who was trembling from palsy or fright, the owner of a truck missing a fender and with a hood held down by a rope; who lived in an unpainted house—that place of his refuge—so unprepossessing that I had never given it the slightest notice in passing by it nearly every day for many years. Head down, he begged my pardon. His wife was dead, his children gone. For most of his life, he had been self-employed, a handyman, and now his income came from muskrat furs and welfare checks. He always intended to inspect his traps every dawn, but these past months had frequently been bedridden, and hadn't he gotten up this morning to check them, feverish though he was? He didn't know anything about the dogs, but he was terribly sorry about the cat.

I used to think now and again about the contrary aspects—the gentleness and the grimness—of the religion I had been born into but had rejected. It seemed to me that if a merciful and omnipotent God existed, Hell could not: for if God knew everything about causality—if He had the answer to every "Why?"—He surely would have to forgive even the most terrible of human crimes. In the present case, I was not God but an animal lover holding the flaps of a robe together.

I said, "Get some Havahart traps—you know, the kind that

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just cage the muskrats—and you can leave them anywhere you want on my land."

He said he couldn't afford them. If that was the case, I said, he'd better not return with his traps to my property, for I would confiscate them; stern as I tried to sound, I felt sorrier for him than I did for the cat he had victimized, who at this moment probably was still sleeping against the belly of a friend.

But relationships between animals, like those between people, can quickly sour. Grabber disappeared a few weeks later, never to return, two days after the night Gandy nearly killed her. Jean and I were awakened by a cry that reminded me of the rabbit's scream as the peasant in Italy drove the pointed stick through its eye to its brain. Grabber was doing the screaming, for she was dangling from Gandy's jaws. At my shout, the dog dropped the cat and assumed an abject posture while the cat scrambled on her three legs to the safety of the basement. "One or the other of them must have had a frightening dream that started the attack," Jean said; but my first thought was, We have but ourselves, and even I find a terrible pleasure in the chase: who or what can save us now? In hindsight, I suppose such a cryptic thought came to me because for a frightening instant I had lost those assumptions of personal integrity and conscience that had enabled me to accept the absence of God from our tangled human affairs. Such a loss can occur when we see ourselves merely as beasts, while denying any quality but brutishness to our fellow animals.

VII. The Road to the Veterinary Hospital

On a balmy night in late June last summer, I sat next to Gandy on the huge slab of slate that, with a thinner slab for a step, probably has served as a front door stoop since 1831, the year our house was built. Humans and some of the unregenerate (or at least undomesticated) animals live at cross purposes, and generations of burrowing rodents—rats, mice, squirrels, chipmunks—have undermined some of the rocks that support that slab, causing it to break under its own weight. One of the sections had begun to tilt. From what distance had Thomas Kelsey, who built this house from the white pines cleared for his

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farmlands, carted this stone, and how had he managed to get it in place? And how could I bring the broken pieces (each of them probably weighed nearly as much as had Tammy, whose body had been so difficult to move from the stable) into alignment before winter ice caused Jean or me to fall? The latter concern is one that wouldn't have come into my mind when I was younger, and only did now because Jean had broken a knee in another kind of accident a few years earlier.

Our house is at a country crossroads, and neither road—one dirt, one blacktop—carries much traffic at night. I listened to the frogs in our pond, diagonally across the intersection from the house but hidden by the highbush cranberries Jean and I had received as plantings from a state conservation agency as food for the birds—though to my knowledge no bird (and no person other than that renowned advocate of wild food, the late Euell Gibbons) ever relished the bitter fruit. Over the years, the pond—where we and our children used to swim—has silted up; maybe future owners of our property would reclaim it for their children.

Why think about such problems on this pleasant and sweet-smelling night? I watched the random pattern of the fireflies, the headlights of a tractor in the field across the road (the neighboring farmer who rents much of our land was working late, baling and collecting hay before the promised rain arrived), and the regular sweep of the searchlight across the clouds, a beacon calling attention to the annual Enfield Firemen's Fair in a field by a busier crossroads—Miller's Corners—three miles away. When our children were young, Jean and I used to take them to that fair, to ride the Ferris wheel and merry-go-round or to try their skill at a variety of games. Once Cris, watching people fruitlessly trying to win goldfish by throwing table tennis balls at the tiny bowls containing them, figured out how to gain so many fish that Jean and I had to buy him an aquarium, for even at ten he had a scientific bent of mind. Instead of throwing the balls, he tossed them, underhanded, high in the air, so that they plopped into the bowls instead of glancing off the rims; after he'd won a half dozen or so, the proprietor of the stand shooed him away and shut down his business long enough for those waiting in line who had

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observed his technique to wander off to the shooting gallery or the pie raffle.

Like those of many classical revival farmhouses in upstate New York, the woodshed of our house is actually built into one of the wings; it has a sliding barn-type exterior door, and another that opens into the kitchen. In the summers, our dogs have always slept in the woodshed with the exterior door open; their presence there keeps rabbits and raccoons out of the nearby vegetable garden. I was walking with Gandy toward the woodshed just as the farmer drove out of the field, his task completed. The tractor headlights lit the bare branches of the line of Russian olives I planted by the roadside a quarter century before to give privacy to the back yard with its picnic table. Those little trees with their shimmering leaves fortunately had never proved appetizing to the goats, and so had given seclusion to our summer suppers outdoors for maybe twenty years; but now most of them were dead. When they first showed signs of dying, I talked to an old acquaintance, a now-retired nurseryman in the nearby hamlet of Mecklenburg, thinking he might know of some antidote for the road salt that I believed was harming them; it shocked me to learn from him that Russian olives (unlike autumn olives, some of which we also had planted, or highbush cranberries) normally live less than twenty-five years. But those trees would at least provide us with some firewood, whenever I got around to cutting them up with a chain saw. It is always a help to think of a new use for something that has died or outlived its purpose: it pleased Jean and me to use the backstop of Jimmy's old baseball diamond as a support for our pole beans.

The tractor puttered down the road, pulling two wagons loaded with the hay that had been ejected into them by the farmer's new hay baler. For years, he had been opposed to such a labor-saving device, simply because he liked the bales of hay to be placed neatly in the wagons, the way a farmer and his sturdy sons can stack them; his new baler piled them randomly, an affront to his sense of order. But his sons, like mine, were grown, his with farms of their own. As I left Gandy in the woodshed, lightning flared up in the northern sky, but thunder never followed, and the rains never came.

The smallest details of that night remain in my mind, the

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events transferred from my short-term memory to the one that will last as long as I do; for in the early hours of the morning Gandy, like Grabber before her, lost a front leg—and part of the shoulder as well. She happened to be on the dirt road—was she in pursuit of a rabbit who had entered our garden?—just as a car came down it, perhaps the only car on that road from midnight to dawn. Jean and I were awakened by a cry of dog-anguish; we ran to the front door just as Gandy reached it. She collapsed in the hallway. The motorist who had hit her stopped his car in front of the house long enough to see we had admitted the dog, and then drove off.

The commotion woke Cris. While Jean and I tried to stem the flow of blood with towels, Cris dialed the emergency number of the Cornell small animal clinic, and explained the nature of the injury to one of the veterinary students on duty that morning. She said she would contact a surgeon, and instructed us to tie a rope around Gandy's muzzle: severely-injured dogs, however gentle they normally are, sometimes bite as they are being lifted. Cris made an emergency litter from a canvas cot. We put no rope on Gandy's muzzle. Gently we put her on that litter and carried her to the bed of Cris's pickup truck. Jean and I climbed into the bed with her; Jean wrapped blankets around Gandy's body, to prevent her from being chilled by the wind as we traveled.

Gandy was making strange noises, and twisting her body on the litter; Jean kneeled on one side of her and I on the other, to keep her secure. I stroked her head, and the ears that were like Bruin's. And so we headed for Ithaca, and the veterinary hospital on the far side of town. We passed the hedgerow where I'd seen the trapper while looking for a comet. Cris turned left on the state highway as I had done in my pursuit of the poacher; half a mile down the highway, we passed the house where I had managed to catch him. Other people now lived in it: I supposed the trapper was dead. At Miller's Corners, I saw the dark tents of the Enfield Firemen's Fair beneath the dark and unmoving Ferris wheel.

The state highway had just been widened and given a new coating of asphalt, the surface now so smooth that the truck seemed airborne, an illusion intensified as we rose and descended with the hills. The fragrance of newly-cut clover and

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timothy, punctuated now and then with the different sweetness of freshly-mowed lawns, accompanied us as we glided along. We were on the road we habitually took, to get to our respective jobs, but everything was transformed by the hour (we had the road completely to ourselves, and every house was dark) and our mission. How strange it was, to be floating through the air like this in a pickup truck driven by a son, to be a white-haired professor kneeling next to an animal that might be dying, while one's wife for forty-five years knelt by the animal's other side, her hair blown back by the wind!

As we neared Ithaca, we passed the house where the Colombian couple had established their goat dairy. They were parents of sixteen children; their offspring had become doctors, nurses, nuns, and business people, and had scattered about the world, some in Europe, some in the Middle East, others in Central and South America and Canada as well as in the United States, but every ten years the family came together for a reunion. Cris, Jean and I had been invited to the goat farm for one of these gatherings. A number of picnic tables had been placed under the limbs of a grand tree in their side yard—that rarity, a full-grown American chestnut that had withstood the blight—and the main dinner fare was a calf roasted on a spit. The couple's children were middle-aged, with children of their own, some of whom had babies. The three older generations sang Colombian songs, and songs of the various countries in which they lived, to the accompaniment of a Spanish guitar.

But soon after that reunion, the goat barn caught fire from a malfunction of the heater used for pasteurization; all of the goats died in the blaze. The couple sold the house and left America to introduce the techniques of goat husbandry to the natives of an island kingdom in the Persian Gulf. How brave and undeterred that elderly couple had been! I heard that the husband, Ignazio, died in a car accident in Mexico City while on a visit to a relative there. The new owners of the property had cut off the vast lower branches of the chestnut. Had those branches decayed, or did the new owners simply want grass to grow beneath the tree which had sheltered the picnic tables? As we drove by that house, I was aware of a kind of abyss or dark cavity, maybe in my mind or in the actual landscape, which once

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had contained the goat barn and the marvel of the chestnut as it had been.

Above us, through a gap in the clouds, I saw the Big Dipper, the end stars of the cup pointing toward the invisible North Star; indifferent as that glitter was to us and our journey, it shone down upon us as if we—Cris, the driver, and Jean and I, the silent kneelers—were figures in some allegory or mystery play that centered on a suffering Gandy but included everything that we journeyed by. In part, my response was an intensification of my feelings on the night that Cris and I, the newborn kid in a box on my lap, had made a similar journey, but now it was accompanied by something else.

The night air was tender not only with the pervasive smell of the various cut grasses, but with the ephemeral nature of our lives and all that we make, on this tiny planet: this was the theme of our play or allegorical tableau. It was a truth I may have long known but never had experienced so absolutely, in body and mind, as I did from the bed of Cris's pickup truck, looking at the seemingly empty structures (the passing houses and barns) that we humans build to provide, in addition to their utility, a necessary illusion of permanence and security. And yet what extraordinary effort we put into these delicate constructions—in creating them from our dreams, and after that in maintaining and prettifying them!

These feelings came, I suppose, not only because of the dark cavity I saw or imagined but because I was conscious of Jean's age as well as my own and was remembering a huge but broken slab of stone at the entrance of our house and was stroking a black sail that belonged both to an idealized animal from my own mythology and one that might now be dying. However much we humans may believe that we share an understanding with them, animals have shorter lives and can't speak; and maybe these are reasons that our experiences over the years with our animals can serve as a metaphor for much that remains more implied than said in our relationships with other humans during the longer curve of our own brief lives. From the crest of the hill, I saw the streetlights of Ithaca, and lights of the roads surrounding another dark cavity, one that held the deep waters of Cayuga Lake.

At the veterinary hospital, a light had been turned on for us

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at the emergency entrance of the small animal clinic, and two white-coated young women were waiting at the door. They carried the litter—Gandy was now completely passive—into an examining room. Cris left, to put his pickup truck in the nearby parking lot. Jean and I stood in the hallway. Though the quarters in the small animal clinic are cramped, preventing it from seeming the cathedral nave the large animal clinic had been to me when Cris and I brought the kid, it still was a comforting sanctuary. I was glad to be a teacher at a university whose faculty includes surgeons and other competent veterinary specialists who don't mind being waked at midnight or 3:00 A.M. to care for a newborn kid or a middle-aged dog of mixed breed.

In addition to gratitude, I was still feeling giddiness from the ride, and asked Jean if the trip had seemed strange to her. She said that she had never been so aware of the evanescence of life or the fragility of houses. We are separate people, Jean and I, and our personalities differ; but we have been married a long time, and sometimes our emotions coalesce like that. Because we are separate, I can't say what the road from our house to the veterinary hospital signified to her that night, but to me it was (and remains) the present section of a road I've been traveling a long time.

VIII. The Pond House

It is now mid-August of the following year. I have found no remedy—other than rock salt mixed with kitty litter in icy weather—for the broken slab at the front door. Jean and I, though, have done something about the pond. We've had it dredged, deepened, and doubled in area; we have put in a sand beach and built a dock for diving. Presently we are finishing the construction of a little pond house, to be used as a cabana and as a Scandinavian-like summer house in which one can be lulled to slumber on sultry nights by the sound of frogs, waking to watch the great blue heron that visits the pond while the morning mists are rising from it, and that returns each evening. The house will serve other good purposes, too: since it will have a wood stove, we can use it as a warming room for ice-skating

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parties, and as a complement to the sauna that Cris plans to purchase. Jim, our youngest son, has done much of the heavy work during visits between his film jobs in New York and elsewhere; he cleared the space of underbrush, dug the post holes, decided to add a deck in front of the pair of sliding glass doors that face the pond, and helped install the roof and siding. To my mind, it's far more impressive than that quaint and precariously-built summer house used as a major setting in the film *My Life as a Dog*. We are building it as carefully as we can, to outlast us all.

On weekends, Jean, Cris, and I have been working toward its completion; on weekday afternoons, Gandy accompanies me (I now teach only in the spring terms) for the several hours I usually spend on the structure, working on tasks I can handle by myself while others earn their salaries. Sometimes Gandy watches me, muzzle on her single front paw; sometimes she plays with two neighboring dogs, Butterscotch and Derby. Though Gandy hops like the rabbit she might have been chasing the night of her injury, she can run for short distances as fast on three legs as Butterscotch and Derby can on four. On weekends, when I and the other members of my family get overly hot from our labors, we go swimming; Gandy, half Laborador that she is, loves the water, and swims along with us. (I was alarmed when she first jumped in the pond, for I was afraid that the loss of a front leg might cause her to drown.) Like the rest of us, Gandy is as happy as she knows how to be.

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LOUIS SIMPSON

August

Gulls float on the Sound,
geese and ducks swim close to shore,
the reeds are gowing tall in August.

As you round Cannon Bluff
the harbor spreads before you:
the ferry to Connecticut
either coming in or going out;
restaurants, fast-food places
and boutiques for the summer crowd.
The hospital, St. Anne's, large and yellow,
on a hill to the west, looking down.
On the other side, to the east,
the Islandwide Lighting Company:
three chimneys like three sisters,
two of them tall and slender,
the third one short and stout.

There is everything you could want
on Broadway: a Chemical Bank,
drugstore, furniture store, newsagent.
A woman arranging dresses
in the window of Dillman's.
A man unloading cases of beer
from a truck. A woman passes . . .
he watches her as she walks away.

So it goes, day by day,
except when there's a traffic accident.
Or when a woman from Smithtown
and another from Miller Place
are arrested for petty larceny;

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when unknown assailants throw a rock
through the rear sliding glass door
of a home on East Meadow Road;
when vandals tear up sods and dump garbage
on the twelfth green of the Oakwood Golf Course.

Then there will be an editorial
in *Sussex News* on the rise of crime,
and Reverend Hunt will deliver his sermon,
"Watchman, what of the night?"
(There were incidents of vandalism
in Palestine long ago.)

But most of the time most people
lead decent, productive lives.
And there's plenty to see and do
on the calendar of events:
the North Shore Pro Musica
at the First Presbyterian Church;
a Pottery Demonstration;
a Two Day Conference on Exporting.

*

There was a wind coming in gusts
from the sea, humid and warm,
and the hand ceased from typing,
the mower from mowing his lawn.

It was raining when night came,
and the wind still rising. Branches
tossed, and the leaves were rushing,
tormented, this way and that.
There was a sound high in the air
like the passing of an express train.
A tree fell with a tearing sound
and crack, and the lights went out.

We sat in the dark with a candle

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and listened to the wind,
and thought of those who were lying
in endless night, forgotten
as though they had never been.
And the wind said, Be afraid
and know yourselves.

So saying,
the great wind turned outward,
and with a distant rumbling
as of boxcars being moved,
returned to the sea where it came.

The Believer

She comes once a week . . . and talks.
Her husband, Jim, is an invalid.
Up to six years ago
a healthy, goodlooking man,
now it exhausts him just to walk
from his chair to the dinner table.

He is irritable and shouts at her
then says that he's sorry.
The worst thing is, he expects her
to drop whatever she's doing
and bring something. He's watching TV
with the boys, and calls to her, "Eadie,
would you bring a glass of water."
He wouldn't think of asking the boys.

She takes her paraphernalia
to the bathroom: bucket and mop,
Tilex for the walls, Bon Ami
for the bathtub and sink. Ammonia
for the toilet. Thirty minutes later

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reemerges and resumes.

"You ought to treat him," said her mother-in-law,
"with more consideration."
"What do you want me to do?"
she said. "Sit beside him and hold his hand,
and cry all day long?"

She belongs to the Church of the Redeemer
and believes she will be saved,
and that all the people she cares about,
since they are a part of her life,
will be saved too. It stands to reason
if you're a believer, don't it?
And I have to agree, it does.

Berkeley in the Sixties

I had a friend named Clem,
a carpenter. He sailed to Vietnam
and came back with a story
about war materiel, whole acres
going to waste. It was mind-boggling.

One moonlit night in Quinhon
the girl he was with whispered,
grasping his arm, "Viet-Cong!"
There were men in black pajamas
flitting across the roofs.

*

I made the peace march from Berkeley
to Oakland, with a lighted candle.
One bystander shook his head
sadly. "Don't you people know,"

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he said, "what you have here?"

Yes, I thought, but didn't say
(we'd been told not to provoke them),
and we're trying to keep it.
The candles went in different directions
on side streets, and went out.

*

There was a sound of voices
in the plaza: Mario Savio . . .
Aptheke, a voice like a corncrake,
and Weinberg: "Don't trust anyone
over thirty," meaning you.

Patsy

When the Whip is still and the Ferris wheel
hangs in the air unmoving,

PRINCESS MY-IMMBA & Her Very Talented
& Versatile Baboons are asleep,

and so is Johnny the hell driver
THE THRILL OF A LIFETIME

HELL DRIVING with a Dodge Pick-Up Truck
hurtling 70 feet through space . . .

then her voice calls from a mountain
on the wind like a widow ghost,

crazy for feeling so lonely
and crazy for loving you.

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Her Weekend in the Country

My wife's sister is visiting
for the weekend. Never again!

She can hardly wait to be back
in her apartment in Sutton Place . . .

East 56th Street,
a walk to the United Nations.

She's bored with the chatter
about people she doesn't know . . .

old copies of *The New Yorker*,
the glassed-in porch with a view

of snowflakes lightly falling
on grass and a child's swing.

Stairs

He told us the story of his life.
The thing that sticks out most
is the death of Jimmy, a son.
He had climbed four flights of stairs . . .
suddenly he collapsed and died.
It seems that one side of the heart
was much larger than the other.

He thinks it may have been the stairs.
When you build them you have to be sure
they're exactly the same height,

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for when you step up or down
"the eye makes an adjustment."
If one is slightly higher or lower
you'll stumble.

He stands in the muddy area
where the steps will be, writing numbers
with a pencil on the wall.
We'll have a devil of a time later
getting them off with soap and water.
But we forgive him. He is a man
with a great deal on his mind.

Suddenly

Nipkow and Cosulich
exported "seconds,"
items with small imperfections,
nylon stockings, ballpoint pens.

I packed them in cellophane or boxes,
then a carton to be shipped
to Europe for their postwar legs
and literary movements.

Nipkow had a sideline, diamonds.
He would sit at his desk by the hour
holding a diamond up to the light
or staring at some little ones
in the palm of his left hand.
He'd rise and grind a diamond
on the wheel. Then put on his coat
and go to meet someone like himself

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with whom he would exchange diamonds,
each of them making a profit
somehow out of this.

One day I suddenly quit.
Then I worked on the *Herald Tribune*.
A reporter would call "Copyboy!"
And one of us would run over
and take his copy to the horseshoe
where the Count, as we named him,
a bald head and rimless glasses,
presided over his crew.
One would read the piece in a hurry
and write a title for it,
so many letters, to fit.

My greatest adventure
was going to the fourteenth floor
of the Waldorf Astoria
to fetch copy about the flower show
at Madison Square Garden.

I quit that job suddenly too.
"You didn't like the export business,"
said Sylvia Cosulich—
I was still seeing her
though her parents didn't approve—
"and you don't want to be a reporter.
What are you going to do?"

In the silence there were sounds
of the traffic down below,
the elevator opening.

Suddenly
the room seemed far away.
I was looking through a window
at clouds and trees.

And looking down again
to write, as I am now.

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West End Avenue

She's back from one of her trips.
"What's this?" said the customs official.
She dabbed his hand with it . . .
"Now doesn't that smell nice?
But what will your wife think?
You'd better have it. No, take it . . .
from me to her, as a gift."

Everyone laughs. And horns and taxis
in the street ten floors below.
"O Eiffel shepherdess,
your flock of bridges bleats this morning."

Between a view of the Seine
and the woman with two left hands
my mother bought at an auction—
the frame alone worth the price—
the poet of *Zone* makes an appearance
with his bandaged head, and smiles.
Shelled silly. We're two of a kind.

My uncle—you may have seen him
at Whelan's, behind the counter—
stares at each speaker in turn.
Everything they say seems to amaze him.
There's not a drop of nastiness
or irony in his disposition.
Of such is the kingdom of heaven.

The bandaged head replies,
"And they leave all the dirty work
of poetry to you and me."

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CHARLES TOMLINSON

Upstate

Climbing across a mountain meadow,
I was walking—I soon saw—
On no more than a word: 'meadow',
With all its English aftertaste
Of luscious pasture, of spring flowers,
Could conceal no longer now
The fact that I was bleeding: barbed stalks
Had scored my ankles, grasses
Grudged me footroom. I should have come
Booted and armoured against harm.
At the summit, once thorns had thinned,
I lay outstretched and submitted to the charm
Of seeing only sky: the golden-rod
Blotted the distances, thickly nodding
Across my eye-line. Sunbursts:
And—between—the flickering blade of air
Declared the wind that was tossing the flowers
And kept the blue so clear today,
Came straight from Canada. You could take
The measure of arriving autumn here
In the cool, brisk stir that bent
The woodland larches. Snow
Was invading my mind already as the chill
Struck into summer. When I came downhill
I took to the wood. It was thicketed.
Soon, my foot found out what seemed
A wandering border of small stones,
Their order, or what was left of it,
A human order. Time here
Rifts as sudden as the weather
In its displacements. They who had ploughed
Or pastured their beasts where now

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Thorn has undone endeavour, lay
  Under this scattering of headstones—some,
As I knelt down, I saw, engraved
  With date and name. History on these hills
Means yesterday, means barns
  And houses that have disappeared already
From the cleared spaces. A graveyard
  In a wood, a brambled meadow—blood
Redefines the word—where growth renews
  Between the asphalt highroads and in view
Of the one constant that I hold in common
  With those who died and those who rode away—
The wide circuit of a mountainous horizon.

Blaubeuren

And now the season climbs in conflagration
  Up to the summits. The thick leaves
Glow on either side of the descent
  A fire-ride carves between the trees—
A blue, unsoundable abyss. The sun
  Is pushing upwards, firing into incandescence
Lingering vapours. The tufted pinetips
  Begin to define the hilltop where a cross—
Too blatant to beckon a heart towards it—
  Stands stolid and ghostly, a dogmatic
Concrete post hardening out of mist,
  And, grey to gold, touch by touch,
The wood mass—beams breaking in—
  Visibly looms above the town. Below
Floats back a climbing bell-chime
  Out of the theological centuries: that, too,
Caught up into the burning vibrancy,
  Seems yet another surface for refraction,
Fragmenting into audible tips of flame.
  The beacon of the day—the mist has burned away now—

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Blazes towards the death and resurrection
  Of the year. To be outlived by this,
By the recurrences and the generations, as today
  Has lived beyond the century of Dürer—
His rocks stand jutting from the foliage here—
  Is to say: I have lived
Between the red blaze and the white,
  I have taken the sacrament of the leaf
That spells my death, and I have asked to be,
  Breathing it in at every pore of sense,
Servant to all I see riding this wave
  Of fire and air—the circling hawk,
The leaves . . . no, they are butterflies
  That love the ash like leaves and then
Come dancing down from it, all lightness
  And away. Lord, make us light enough
To bear the message of this fine flame
  Rising off rooted things, and render it
Back to the earth beneath them, turning earth
  Itself, while the light still holds,
To a steady burning, a clarity
  Bordering the blue, deep fold of shadow:
Cars, weaving the woodslope road,
  Glitter like needles through the layered leaves.

Response to Hopkins

'What by your measure is the heaven of desire . . . ?'

Camomile sweetens the cliff-top grass:
  Below, vivid uncertainties disturb
The massing of these waters: you would not think
  That the tide was receding where they beat,
As the wind piling wave on wave

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Pulls against the insistence of the moon.
And do they belong to the sea or to the sky
These purples and these greens? The water
Washing its predilections from the eye,
Carries such light in it, that when the hawks
Red-brown flash by, their colour
Lightens at the reflection from beneath. Above,
All kinds of cloud—cumulus climbing,
Fair weather dapple and horizon mist,
Fill up the air-lanes all the way
Inland to Dartmoor. Their shadows
Move on the waste, hastening across,
Masking each sunburst and so transform
Space to an inland sea awaiting storm.
What by my measure is the heaven of desire?
This inconstant constancy—earth, water, fire.

Picking Mushrooms by Moonlight

Strange how these tiny moons across the meadows,
Wax with the moon itself out of the shadows.
Harvest is over, yet this scattered crop,
Solidifying moonlight, drop by drop,
Answers to the urging of that 0,
And so do we, exclaiming as we go,
With rounded lips translating shape to sound,
At finding so much treasure on the ground
Marked out by light. We stoop and gather there
These lunar fruits of the advancing year:
So late in time, yet timely at this date,
They show what forces linger and outwait
Each change of season, rhyme made visible
And felt on the fingertips at every pull.

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Looking Down

for Attilio Bertolucci on his first flight

You hang above the horror and the peace
Of endlessness, and watch this plain of cloud
Furrowed like fields, but fields where no growth stirs
Save piled and drifting change. Then suddenly
The lights of houses and the lights of cars,
Spreading their bright inversion of the stars,
Map out the transmutations of your home—
That metamorphosis that still means Rome.

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ROBERT SCHULTZ

Vietnam War Memorial, Night

To the left the spotlit Washington Monument
Jabs the air, progenitive, white;
Beyond trees, to the right, the stonework glows
Where Lincoln broods in his marble seat;

And here, between, in the humid dark,
Where curving pathways lead and branch,
Sally and I step forward carefully
Somewhere near the open trench.

Choppers shuttle across the sky
With jets for National crying down,
But we've lost our way. The intricate dark
In the center of town moves all around.

There are others here: white T-shirts drift
In heavy air. Then three bronze soldiers
Caught in floodlights across the field
Stare hard at where we want to go.

From above we find the wall's far end
And begin to descend. Ahead of us
Soft footlights brush the lustered stone,
Dim figures trace their hands across

The rows of letters, and others, hushed,
File past in the dark. At first we are only
Ankle deep in the names of the dead,
But the path slopes down. Quietly,

We wade on in. In the depths beside
The lit inscription, men and women

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Hold each other, mortal, drowning.
Many have stopped at a chosen station

To touch an absence carved away.
From deep inside the chiselled panels
Particular deaths rush out at them.
The minds of veterans gape like tunnels

To burning huts. We are over our heads.
Now Sally turns, sobs hard, and stops.
We cling to each other like all the rest
And climb away with altered steps.

Black Velvet

Cars lunge into the city,
Four abreast and pushing seventy.

Night's seductions draw us in.
Red streaks glow where the sun has fallen

On blackened stacks. Glittering turrets
Blaze at evening, towers of commerce

Burly-shouldered and empty-eyed.
Lit apartments hang their gardens against the sky.

Traffic hums in its usual groove.
I glide with others, homing through

Toward familiar rooms. Halfway there
The billboard rises. Its brilliant square

Presents a woman in evening dress
Reclining by two glasses, ice,

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And the opened bottle. She fingers
Its neck. The gesture lingers

As her level gaze
Attracts my eyes.

Here, in public, in a private car,
Fill the scene with your own desire:

Ceremonial drinks, two voices rubbing
Like bow and string,

The alcohol whispering,
Senses, velvet, extending dark wings.

I wince at the wrong,
The same old come on,

Women arranged by men and dollars
In poses drawn from early masters.

But sweeping around this curve in the dark—
Her form suspended, a park

Erected among the buildings
That light the city, stacked and burning—

I always look, each nightly trip,
From shoulder to waist

To the dangerous swerve of the hip.

Winter in Eden

There are no fences, no gates in the snowy
fields and wrecked orchards; only the sword-blade

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winter light swings north to south, east to west
where the straight horizon locks itself with ice

to a sky too bright to look at. We are free
among the trees of knowledge, gleaning

shrivelled apples and berries, sweet
as they melt in our warm mouths. Memory

flares as we walk beneath the torn limbs.
At home each night the dream arrives, insistent

as a chanted word: the slim trunk rises,
branches dense with scalloped leaves protecting

their fruit—globes the colors of perfect bodies,
naked, shameless in the tree of life.

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ANDREW HUDGINS

The Roosting Tree

Egged on by older boys,
I'd run up, touch the tree
—a cedar white with droppings—
and hop back as the hens
pecked my fat ankles. Then
I'd lie awake at night
convinced I'd die: I'd watched
hens jab the dirty silk
of spider webs, jerk back,
pause, flip their heads up, swallow.
I stared. *Only a thing*
that's poisonous itself
eats spiders, Grandmomma said.
And I believed her. I'd seen them
jab at each other's raw,
red flaws until they crippled
and killed a bird that could
have been themselves. Or me.
But when Grandmomma marched
out to the tree, I followed
and crowed at the hens, as she
grabbed one bird by the neck
and snapped her wrist. Waist-high,
held out away from her,
the dead bird walked on air
and flapped. I ran behind,
crowed, clucked, and flapped my arms,
till Grandmomma
said *Shush, boy*, and I shushed.

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The Tell-Tale Heart

Sent to fetch eggs, I'd pause
a long time, eying the hens,
afraid that when I reached,
they'd drive those wicked beaks
into my fingers. I'd
stand paralyzed until
Grandmother'd snatch me back,
swat at the squawking hens,
steal their hot eggs, and make
two fried-egg sandwiches.
I'd hold mine up before
my brother's face and squeeze
the unbroken yolk between
two slices of white bread.
It bulged. *Thump, thump*, I'd say.
It's the tell-tale heart. Thump!
Thump, thump! It's coming to
get you! And then I'd squeeze
the soft bread hard. The yolk
exploded. My brother screamed.
And I, before his face,
would eat the yellow heart.

Acquired Taste

Sprawled on my Roy Rogers bedspread,
book on the floor, head down, I read
of Long John Silver, buried gold—
and as I read I worked a penny
between my thumb and Daddy's metal file.
And when it dwindled thin enough,

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I scraped the edges and increased
my holdings one thousand percent
so I could, once a week, entice
a soda from the box. Time after time,
I pitched my false dime through the slot
before I heard the slow *ka-chunk*
and the red box disgorged a stolen coke
that detonated in my mouth,
and stung. Cold needles pricked my tongue.
I took another painful swallow,
not liking or desiring it,
but wanting to, desiring that,
and penny, penny, penny—dime,
dime, dime—I kept on till I did.

Granny Pounds

Inside the tilted shotgun shack, she waited:
one arm, one leg, one eye with a black patch.

Come here and hug old Granny Pounds, she squawked.
Although just five, I knew what this was: witch.

Or close enough for me. "Go on!" Mom whispered,
shoved me. And Granny's blue eye glittered. She knew

she'd never see this boy again: great-grandchild,
her first. *Come to your Granny Pounds*, she wheedled.

And when I sidestepped into reach, she grabbed me
and hugged my neck, pulled me into her scent

of mildew and Mentholatum. I gave myself to her.
Death seized Life, squeezed me, never let me go.

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My Father's Rage

As I kicked through the swinging door,
the turkey shifted on the platter.
I juggled, lost it, clipped the bird
with the platter's edge, and the hot meat
slid, skittered—greasy—on the floor,
and smacked the polished army boots
of Sergeant Turner, our Thanksgiving guest.
My Daddy grabbed me by the throat
and slammed me up against the wall,
which boomed. My mother gasped. I lost
my breath and couldn't get it back.
"You stupid idiot!" my father screamed.
Then Sergeant Turner touched Dad's arm.
"Lon," he said, "we've eaten worse—
when we were growing up." Dad sighed,
and then, reluctantly, he let me drop.
But now his crazy rage is gone
to whole days watching teevee, watching
golf, football, news. His rage gone to whole days
watching the fucking weather station.
And I, goddamn his eyes, I want it back.

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T. M. McNALLY

The Last Year of the Soapbox

My father used to tell me how to live. Always pay your taxes. Remember your mother's birthday. Never jump-start a corroded battery. He believed in making things work and trying to avoid explosions.

After I was born, he designed the suspension for the 1962 Lincoln from the parts of a '58 Packard. He owned one grey suit, the same he was married in, and travelled around the country as a free-lance automotive engineer. One winter he lived in Bemidji, Minnesota, where he spent the days driving cars across a frozen lake. My father, who had been raised in Saint Petersburg, Florida, said it was cold, lonely work. Later, after he became respectable and middle-aged, after he became head of R&D for a mid-sized corporation which specialized in suspension and exhaust, he told me to do what I want.

"You're going to have to work all your life," he told me. "Make sure it's something you enjoy."

At the time, I had just turned seven, and I like things to go fast. A few years ago, before I finally gave up racing for good, I placed twenty-third at Indy. The year Mark Donahue won, I was a kid hanging out in his pits. My father had helped develop the suspension in Donahue's car, too; they were showing me the ropes. "If you drive a green car," my father explained, "they'll have to tow you in." Now everyone races a green car, and I drive for WAEC, Western Automotive Engineering Consultants, which I own. We're based in Phoenix and work mostly with prototypes. I do some commercial work on the side.

Today we're doing a shoot in Oak Creek Canyon, down highway 89A, *Arizona's Scenic Highway*, the sign says. And the premise is easy enough: I drive a thirty-five thousand dollar black European sedan through the switchbacks. I drive hard but safe, goosing the clutch, avoiding disaster. I brake for two lonesome cows. I pass a green and yellow camper full of

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grandparents from Iowa on an outside stretch and drive on into town, Sedona, a town full of turquoise, pretty vistas and California license plates. Everyone's staring wide-eyed as I pass through town in my black European sedan. At the three-way, I make a left and drive past the Circle-K to Poco Diablo, a golf and tennis resort stuffed with weeping willows, and by the time I pull up to the entrance, the car has been washed three times; the light is fading; Sandy, the director, is getting cranky; and when I finally get out of the car, it's not me anymore. It's a girl wearing a white dress with legs that'll snap a tie-rod. She's standing by the car near an overflowing fountain. The water is spraying, the bellhop's blushing, the rising music a combination jazz and new age guitar—and there's this girl, all in white, looking like money and silk.

You want the road, the announcer will say. *The road wants you. This is now.*

It's enough to make you hock your wedding ring, a commercial like that. Anything just to get a down payment and take that girl home and have her whisper in your ear, driving her home while she holds your hand in the warm space between her thighs until, later, when the car sits under a carport, compounding its interest daily, you start feeling spiritually bankrupt. A girl like that's a fine piece of work. "A fine piece of engineering," my father might have said, as if he'd designed the struts himself. "Just look at those knees!" and you know exactly where you want her to put them. You want her to put those knees on your chest, under the full weight of her body, until your breath stops cold.

In Homewood, Illinois, where I grew up, I was a fat kid. Weekly I'd get the crap kicked out of me by boys already developed—the ones with muscles and a thatch of hair sprouting from their loins. To make matters worse, my father had agreed to let my mother name me after her brother who had fallen into a river at the age of three.

"Herbie," my mother would say. "Come home after school." She was afraid if I did not come home after school, I would be picked on. Also, I have since realized, had I not come home from school, my mother would have had no one to talk to: I was the Herbert she never had. We went grocery shopping to-

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gether. Though we had our own washer and dryer, we did laundry at the Highland Laundromat; the basement was too damp, she'd say. She never did read Betty Friedan. Instead, she took me to department stores and bible studies and always, if I ever complained, she'd attack with God on her side. Why was I so ungrateful? Why was I so selfish when I had what Uncle Herbert, that water-logged three-year-old, never would?

Once, when she was convinced I was using heroin, she explained to me the dangers of syphilis and gonorrhea, diseases so pernicious and vile, she explained, yelling, that if you rubbed your eyes after going to the bathroom, you'd go blind and kill all your children. You'd even give it to your wife when she rubbed at her eyes after you gave it to her.

"Do you want to do that?" she screamed in the car, where we sat parked in front of the Highland Laundromat. The car smelled like fresh laundry, and I had to go to the bathroom. "Is that what you want? To stick your little penis inside some filthy animal and die in prison?"

"No."

"No! No?! Then what's this!" She held up a pack of Trident sugarless gum, cinnamon, that she'd found in my pockets.

"It's gum," I said. "I'm trying not to be fat."

It was an idea that never occurred to her; my father had been spending more and more time out of town, in Europe, and California. Most people, especially heroin addicts, chewed gum to cover their breath. My mother had read about it in a magazine. And even today my mother expects me to forgive her these mistakes. She lives in Ocotillo Gardens, where she gets reasonable medical care and writes her memoirs, where I visit with her once a month only if she'll promise not to ask me any questions.

Because I'm Episcopalian, I spend most of each service on my knees. In 1986, at Daytona, I buried a Camaro into the third wall. I broke both knees, a hand, and was in Tucson's burn unit for six months. I have scars over most of my upper body and neck and face. Usually, I wear turtlenecks, except for summer when it's too hot, and in church I pray for the forgiveness of sins, I take communion, and I feel good about the way my knees always ache.

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Sandy, the director for the commercial, says she understands. When her husband left, she wanted it to be his fault. "Still," she told me, "I know it's mine."

After the shoot, we're sitting in the bar, Brandy's, drinking tequila sunrises. Hope, not her real name, the girl in white, has changed into a T-shirt and jeans. The film crew is drinking beer, and Hope explains that she changed her name for commercial purposes. She's going to be a television personality.

"What kind?"

"Oh, you know. The kind people have to think about a lot. Like Madonna."

"Bert," says Sandy. "Let's stay the night."

We both know Sandy's a little drunk; no one spends the night at a place called Poco Diablo without first considering the consequences. From the bar you can see a putting green, marked by a single flag.

"That'd be nice," Hope says.

"Let us be grateful," I say, holding up my drink, "for what we have in hand."

It wasn't until the seventh grade that I learned I could fight back. Mike Soper was picking on me in the locker room. He'd pissed on me in the showers, and now, by my locker, he was snapping me with his jock. Barry Bloyd and John Jakel were throwing one of my sneakers back and forth over my head. Jakel was a skinny kid who smoked pot, and he was calling me *Herb the Perv*. I didn't know exactly what a *Perv* was, but I knew Soper had stuck his hand up inside Linda Carlyle's sweater in the hall between third and fourth periods. I knew, too, that being a *Perv* couldn't be a very good thing to be. So I pushed him, kind of.

"Look," Soper said. "Herb's getting mad!"

Everyone looked. Barry Bloyd laughed and threw my shoe at me. It hit me in the face and I began to cry.

"What are you going to do, Herb? Punch me?"

"Yeah, Sope," Jakel said. "He's going to punch you!"

Tom Ogata picked up my sneaker and gave it to me. Pierre LeClair, who everyone knew was gay because he had a French name, told Soper to cut it out.

"Cut it out," Pierre said, his voice unexpectedly deep.

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And now everyone looked at Pierre, and Soper cut it out. But Jakel didn't. He punched me in the stomach. He snapped my underwear, and I just stood there. I stood there by the bench while Jakel started slapping my head and I realized that I could punch too. He kept slapping at my head until Soper said, "Cut it out!"

But what I thought was, "No. Don't."

Every now and then, Sandy and I get together. We usually start out over dinner, talking about her divorce, and her husband, Wayne, who left her for an actress. In Phoenix there aren't many actresses, most go to Hollywood, but what's important, Sandy explains, is that the girl "wants to be an actress." She has blonde hair and does commercials for local car dealers. She has a degree in Broadcasting and was a former runner-up for Ms. Montana, or Miss Montana. Sandy can never remember which.

"Besides," Sandy will say, "I couldn't give him what he wanted."

"Which is?" I ask, politely, if I want the evening to carry on. Each time the answer varies. Sometimes it's *love*. Sometimes it's *excitement*. Sometimes, *me*.

When I don't want the evening to carry on, I talk about my divorce. Everyone but Sandy seems to understand that the best way to shut down an evening is to start talking about old flames.

One night, after dinner, pizza, while my mother was drinking wine in her bedroom, and my father was drinking beer in his garage, I went outside to talk to him. I was in my pajamas and the cement floor was cold.

My father was cleaning a carburetor from an old MG he'd picked up at a junkyard for fifty dollars. He had a cigarette between his lips, his hands were soaked with gas, and I asked him to teach me how to fight.

"What?"

"You're my dad," I said. "If you don't teach me, who will?"

He let out a stream of smoke through his nose, wiped his hands on a rag, and took the cigarette from his lips. He held the cigarette with his thumb and forefinger and pointed it right at me. "What you must understand," he said, "is this."

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I waited for him to pick his words. I watched the cigarette in his hand, and now he turned and reached for his glass of beer, his back facing me.

"Your mother will always be right," he said. "You must promise me never to fight with her."

I stood there, watching his back, the way the muscles in his shoulders moved, and realized I'd come to the right place—the garage. And then he turned, facing me, cocking an eyebrow. The glass in his hand was covered with grease, and whenever I want to remember him, I remember that eyebrow, and his eye, looking right through me.

"You'll only lose," he said.

"Okay."

And then he set down his glass. He ruffled my hair and taught me how to make a proper fist.

In college, once while showing off in front of some girls, I broke my roommate's jaw. We had been sparring, showing off, when my roommate popped me in the gut. Pissed, I caught him clean in the chin, snapping his jaw. After taking him to the hospital for x-rays, I drove back to school and moved in with my girlfriend; my roommate had his mouth wired shut, someone said, and he didn't want to live with me anymore. I have also, to the best of my knowledge, done several others damage. I've broken two arms, multiple ribs, and three noses, one of which belonged to that same girlfriend, later my wife, Cathy.

I've learned to call them accidents, traffic accidents, and now here I am in a Jacuzzi with Bob, the cameraman; Sandy, the divorcée; and Hope, the rising television personality. The night is black and full of satellites, the air quick as ice. My limbs feel like ghosts, even my knees don't ache, and we're all buck naked except for me because I'm wearing a T-shirt and shorts.

"This is the life," says Bob, who's lighting up a joint. The smoke rises with the steam up into the sky, and I'm thinking this is what happens when you drive the right kind of car.

"Bert," says Sandy. "This is the life."

"I love it," says Hope, who is both stunning and ludicrous. Sometimes her leg brushes up against mine, her skin feels soft as water, and I want to ask her if she really knows what she is doing.

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And I know Sandy doesn't really think this is the life. She's been around the block enough times to know this is just a Jacuzzi, full of drunk, lonely people and excessive chlorine. None of this is going to be on tape. After we get out, no one's going to stick it in a VCR. And I know I'll be the first one out, regardless of Hope's thigh, because the steam is thick and making it hard to breathe and tomorrow I've got to visit my mother. It's her birthday. She wants a computer program called Word Perfect.

The way I look at it is this: if we don't do what's right because we want to, then what's the good in it?

I've often wondered what my father thought of me, one of those kids only parents can love: the kind who tries hard, says cute things at the dinner table two, three times a week, and comes home with C's on his report card. As I see it, my father had two choices. He could love me, or he could admit his mistake, which would naturally involve my mother. It was easier to love me and try not to notice my lack of coordination. And on the day I turned fifteen, the same day my mother drove her station wagon with a prototype exhaust to Denver, taking the good china along with her, my father signed me up for the Soap Box Derby. He was going to teach me how to race.

"It's all in the design," he told me, tapping my temple. "It begins here."

That was a good year for me. My mother sent postcards from Vail and had a *platonic affair* with her ski instructor, whom she had met at a function entitled *Skiers for God*, and my father began to come home from work early. We'd eat hamburgers and go down to the basement and make plans.

We had to use regulation wheels and axles and a steering mechanism. We had periodic inspections. We dropped thirty pounds of lead into the tail end; weight and gravity, my father explained, work best at the finish. After school I came home and sanded my car, inch by measured inch. I watched the muscles in my arms grow. The car was a layback design, wind resistance was something to be avoided, and in the basement, I'd sit in my car and dream about wind, and driving, and glory. By the time we were finished, the car was a deep red. "Nothing

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gaudy," my father said. "Nothing that looks fast. You want to take them by surprise."

The he asked a draftsman who worked at his company to do the decorating: on the driver's side, in small block letters, my name; and on the other, *Pollution Free Special!* This was, my father explained to the draftsman, to be the last year of the Soapbox Derby.

I won fifth place.

My father died from a series of strokes during my senior year in college. I came home after the first one to argue with my mother and study for finals. I remember getting drunk a lot and standing around in his garage. I went through his tools and found his college diploma underneath a set of Allen wrenches. I found a picture of him and my mother, circa 1957, at the beach. Even in the fifties, people could still be beautiful, and when I returned to Pittsburgh, to that same engineering school my father had attended, I told Cathy I wanted to get married. If she didn't want to marry me, fine. But I was going to do it.

"Women don't get married like that anymore," she said. We were sitting at a bar in Shadyside, and she was trying to be nice. "Smart women go to New York," she said. "We buy stocks and work at large banks and visit our lovers on the weekend." The way she said that word, *Lover*, it was pretty clear she was going to want one some day.

"I want a wife," I said.

"You don't want to feel bad."

Three months later, after graduation, we were married in Connecticut, and I was offered a job for a third-rate team as a mechanic. By December, I was driving my first stock car, and Cathy was doing a correspondence MBA. And everything was fine: an entry level position, a beautiful wife, a manageable amount of debt.

By 1985, we were living in Cleveland, Ohio.

Don't get me wrong, I've been kissed by the best of them—though usually they're wearing a bikini and too much make-up. When I placed second at the Oakland 500, I received a trophy delivered to me by a former Ms. Hawaiian Tropic. She smelled like coconut oil.

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I don't think Hope wears coconut oil. Sandy is looking at me longingly, her hand in Bob's lap—you can tell by the look on his face, and I'm just not as good with women as I should be. Hope sits up on the lip of the Jacuzzi now, escaping the steam, and puts her hand on my shoulder.

"This is fun," she says. "I feel like I'm famous."

She starts to giggle and reaches down to kiss me, but I hold her off. I stand, swing her by the armpits over towards Sandy and Bob. Now she's splashing in the water going for Bob because momentum is a hard thing to stop, and I'm up and out reaching for my towel. I'm toweling off in fifty degrees worth of weather. I want to take off my T-shirt because it's cold. Sixty yards to my left is a room with a nice view in the morning and clean sheets. Two hours south, Ocotillo Gardens, and my mother. Cathy works for a bank in Newark, she's involved with some important decisions, and I'm smart enough to know I'm getting too old for all of this.

Everyone always want to touch them—your scars, especially when it's dark, and my mother never did learn to ski. The reason she left on my birthday for Denver was because she was convinced my father was having an *erotic affair*. She was going through his T-shirt drawer, counting his condoms, when she came up two short. Actually, there were three missing. I know because I took them. I had gone into the backyard, behind the woodshed, and put them on. All three of them like socks in December. I put them on and waited for something to happen until it did. Three days later my mother left, calling my father an *infidel* and *adulterer*, throwing the remaining Trojans at him in the kitchen where he stood drinking his beer, quiet as salt. When she backed her station wagon out the driveway, the glasspacks chugging like a hot rod, my father said, "Well, I guess she's off to Denver."

Even so, I never told him. I never told him I'd taken his condoms. And he never told me he'd had an affair. It was the kind of thing best kept inside of us where it belonged, man to man.

Now, in Sedona, Arizona, I'm wishing he told me—the big, scarred kid who didn't learn how to fight until it was too late to do any good. I'm sitting on the edge of my bed, naked and

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almost content for the first time in months, drinking my bourbon and listening to the springs of some bed on the other side of the wall flex. It's a comforting sound, really. I like to know that people out there, maybe some couple you see in a restaurant ordering orange juice and toast, are the same you heard the night you couldn't sleep—the night you passed up on Hope, the night of her first break. And the woman's pitch is rising now, an engine winding out. Any moment, I think. Any moment now and that woman's going to explode.

Before the war took place on CNN, back when gas prices had bottomed out and people in Texas were swimming in oil, we entered headlong into the age of the fuel-injected V-6. But my father was a man who put his stock in the carburetor, something you could measure by the throat—home equity, career development, a college education for some kid you happened to let your wife name Herbert. He believed in self-sufficiency and the Alaskan pipeline.

When he was dying, I visited him between strokes. Once, while he could still speak, I asked him why he never became a driver. It was an innocent enough question. The nurses were bringing him lunch, my mother was downstairs looking for a chapel, and the Indy time trials were up on the television.

And then he started crying. I had never seen my father cry, but here he was, staring up at Richard Petty on the TV and crying.

Later that night I snuck him a beer, and the next morning he had another heart attack. And then another. He became aphasic, paralyzed, comatose. It was the first time I'd ever heard that word in its proper context, *comatose*. Three days later he was dead.

If I hadn't blown a cam at Indy in '88, I might have placed higher than twenty-third. This was to be the year of my comeback, though I'd never really been anywhere to speak of. Even at thirty, I was still making C's.

Cathy was waiting for me in the pits. She was wearing jeans and our team jacket. I peeled off my fire gear and she drove me back to our motel, before the race was over, and then she took me to bed without a word.

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In the morning she had to catch a flight to Cleveland—a meeting at her bank. They were going to sell their Guaranteed Student Loan paper to a servicing company in Jacksonville—Shylocks with secretaries, Cathy called them. She stood dressing in front of the mirror—a white blouse, a dark skirt. Her banking attire. She looked at me in the mirror and said, hopefully, "Well at least it's over."

"There's always next year," I said.

"Why?" she said, spinning around. "Why!" and now she was in tears. She threw her hair brush at me, and then a glass, still wrapped in cellophane. The glass knocked over a lamp.

"You know why."

"No," she said, shaking her head. "No, no, no! Look at you!" she screamed, pointing. "Just look at you!"

And of course she was right. But how do you tell that to someone you love?

So I hit her.

There is no pain like that of a burn. It is pure and inviolable. At the burn unit, I remember Cathy standing by me, dressed like an angel—a surgical gown, a white mask to prevent infection. Imagine that: being infected by your wife. Even now the thought makes me wince, makes all the dead skin over my body itch for its ghost.

And this morning, slid under my door is a note, from Sandy: *Taking the Beamer,* it says. *Sorry about last night. Call.* It's typical of Sandy to try and keep things sensible. "It was a fluke," she'll say. "Like my marriage. You know you're the only guy that's ever turned me down?"

Given enough time you can explain anything. As for the morning, it's bright as race day. The willows are green, the birds are singing, and even the coffee is fresh. I drink my coffee and listen to the breeze, and this is what I'm thinking: all over the world, people are doing the same thing.

In 1972, Chevrolet, the official sponsor of the Soap Box Derby, bagged out. Helping kids build cars was no longer an efficient use of corporate dollars: they were retooling for the gas crisis and foreign competition, they were looking into catalytic converters and more economical forms of advertising.

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And while there were a few scattered attempts afterwards to keep the derby going, the race had lost its momentum. You can only go downhill for so long.

My mother returned from Colorado a month before the big day, in May, when the snow had all but left the highest mountain. She began to go to night school, where she earned a Bachelors degree in English and wrote a long paper on *The Scarlet Letter*. Simply, she had decided to write her life story. Even now, when she's not taking her walks or chatting with the nurses, she's typing away on the laptop I bought her last Christmas. She says its takes a lifetime to figure out what one's done. She's very careful about her pronouns. She wants to get it just right.

So what did I get right? I got in my Pollution Free Special on top of that platform in Park Forest, Illinois. I remember looking down at my first rush of speed and thinking this was the greatest day of my life—me in this car, with all these people watching, and knowing, secretly, that the guy on my left didn't have a prayer. My mother had seen to that, and I went up on that starting block seven times: in my car, with the layback design, steering myself straight as possible. And when I finally did lose, to a kid thirty pounds fatter than me, I knew I had lost something that no one else could. This was my life, and later, this afternoon, when I show up to visit my mother, at Ocotillo Gardens, she'll be waiting in the rec room pretending to be busy. She'll be wearing her new pink dress, her hair will be fresh, and for a while, maybe just for a moment or two, she'll forget about her arthritis and autobiography. She'll see me with candy and flowers and her birthday present, wrapped in newspaper, and then she'll pick at some lint on her sleeve.

"Come over here and sit," she'll say. "You're late."

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BERT CARDULLO

Grotesqueries

WHILE FRANCO WAS ALIVE, the Spanish director Carlos Saura (born 1932) made several films implicitly (and sometimes not so implicitly) critical of the dictator's regime and the civil war that established his rule: among them *The Hunt* (1966) and *Cousin Angelica* (1973) stand out. But after Franco's death in 1975, Saura stopped making such movies, and the result has been a decline in the thematic substance of his work—I am thinking particularly of *Antonieta* (1982) and *The Stilts* (1984) as well as the ballet films *Blood Wedding* (1981), *Carmen* (1983), and *Love the Magician* (1986). Now in *Ay, Carmela!*, Carlos Saura confronts the evil of Francoism once again, despite the fact that "El Caudillo" has been dead for over fifteen years, and one can only conclude from the quality of this film that Saura's art, like some people's lives, achieves its highest pitch when it can direct its energies against a foe—*the* foe in this case. This is not to say that *Ay, Carmela!*, or any of the director's other films that treat the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath, is propaganda, only that it depends on the specter of Generalissimo Franco to reinforce the truth of its tragicomedy.

Saura and Rafael Azcona adapted their script from the play by José Sanchis Sinisterra, which I have not read but of which, in a *formal* sense, there seems to be little trace. In 1938 two vaudevillians, Carmela and her husband, Paulino, together with their mute, adolescent guitarist, Gustavete, entertain Republican troops at the front in Aragon. Even though they are Republican sympathizers whose mission is to boost the morale of front-line troops, Carmela, Paulino, and Gustavete decide to retreat to Valencia, a safer locale, after an enemy bombing raid. Along the way, they are intercepted by Falangist soldiers, who imprison them for aiding the Red cause and then, instead of executing them, force them to entertain Nationalist troops. In order to do this, they must substitute pro-Franco material for their pro-Republican numbers—something the practical Paulino finds much easier to do than the high-spirited Carmela. In one instance, Paulino must recite an ode to Fascism by Federico de Urrutia instead of an ode to Republicanism by Antonio Machado; in another instance, Carmela must play a whore dressed in the blue, yellow, and red Republican flag who has been impregnated by the nation of Russia (in the person of Gustavete, wearing a red shirt emblazoned with a black hammer and sickle), instead of the figure of Liberty clothed in a white dress and holding the scales of justice. She attempts to play the whore

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of the Republic but finally cannot, twice interrupting her Fascist début with Loyalist sentiments that are taken up by Polish prisoners from the International Brigade, one of whom is smitten with Carmela and all of whom are to be executed the next day. They sit in the balcony of the Teatro Goya, enjoying their last hours of life; Carmela commands the stage, sacrificing her life to their cause when a Falangist fires on her from the orchestra after her second pro-Republican outburst.

Gustavete moans over the body of this woman who has behaved like a mother toward him, but his moans—the first and only sounds he makes in the film—should not be mistaken for speech, as some critics have argued, the gift of which he has miraculously received as a result of Carmela's "martyrdom" and which he will now use to carry on the Republican struggle. In the first place, Gustavete, Carmela, and Paulino are entertainers, not political reformers. In the second place, Gustavete's moans are purely an emotional reaction to the loss of his mother-substitute and co-performer. Indeed, so strongly does Carmela's death affect Gustavete, so deeply does he respond to it on a human level as opposed to a political one, that he surrenders the only means he has had up to now for communicating with her and Paulino: his small chalkboard, which he places atop her grave bearing the inscription "Carmela, 1900-1938." The implication is that Gustavete has nothing more to say now that Carmela is gone, not that his tongue has been loosed by the Falangist violence against her; that Carmela, with her chalk-marked grave, is one more anonymous casualty of the Spanish Civil War, not that her death will inspire Gustavete and his cohorts to rise up against the Fascist menace.

So *Ay, Carmela!* is not an allegory of political opportunism become political virtue, with proletarian sentiment winning out in the end. Paulino is no political opportunist: he's a vaudevillian who rightly fears for his and his wife's lives at the hands of the Falangists and does what he must to survive, as does Carmela—until, almost in spite of herself, and spurred on by the presence of the condemned Poles in the balcony of the theatre, she screams what she really thinks of her Falangist hosts. My point is that Paulino and Carmela, together with Gustavete, are faced with an irresolvable dilemma: entertain the enemy or die, appear to collaborate with the Fascists or be executed by them. Political *calculation*, be it disguised as rightism or leftism, never enters into their decision-making; these are simple people caught up on the stage of world history, doing the best they can under the circumstances.

Saura takes up the familiar metaphor of "all the world's a stage" in *Ay, Carmela!*, and it works because it is earned: the world of politics and war *has* penetrated Carmela and Paulino's variety act, to the point that Carmela gives her life on stage for her politics, for her irrepressible belief in the Loyalist cause as well as for the irresistible opportunity to play the role of Republican antagonist in the drama of the

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Spanish Civil War. Ironically, it was Carmela's theatrical gift (and ripe beauty) that saved her, along with Paulino and Gustavete, from execution by the Falangists, and now it is that same gift, uncontained by the bounds of the Teatro Goya stage, that gets her killed. Fittingly, shortly before her death Carmela sings a rousing hymn to her country in which her life—together with the lives of *all* of Spain's soldiers, Fascists and Republicans alike—converges with her art on the last line: "Spain, I die for you." That convergence was visually suggested during Carmela, Paulino, and Gustavete's interrogation by Lieutenant Ripamonte, an Italian fighting on Franco's side who is in charge of boosting the morale of Falangist troops. Ripamonte fashions himself a man of the theatre who knows an artiste when he sees one, hence his plucking of these three artistes from prison camp for the purpose of playing to crowds of Italian and Spanish soldiers. At the start of the lieutenant's questioning (for the record, Carmela, Paulino, and Gustavete are charged with "attempting to infiltrate the Nationalist rear guard"), the apparently small interrogation room is illuminated only by a desk lamp and tension is created by repeated cutting between Ripamonte and the trio. Once it becomes clear, however, that the Italian is really interviewing or auditioning the entertainers, not preparing to pronounce sentence upon them, the house lights come up in long shot and reveal the cavernous inside of the Teatro Goya, on whose stage this audition has been taking place and from which the relieved Paulino blurts out, "Long live Mussolini!"

It is no accident that this theatre bears the name "Goya," since *Ay, Carmela!*, like other films by Saura, is filled with instances of *esperpento*, a blend of the grotesque and the macabre, of the deadly serious and the darkly comic, to be found in the work of Goya as well as Quevedo, Gracian, Valle-Inclán, and Buñuel. Why is *esperpento*, or let us simply say the grotesque, particularly suited to the subject of *Ay, Carmela!*? Because, as Bert O. States writes,

> The grotesque is essentially a marriage of malicious irony and low comedy, and it is attended by a pervasive distortion and leveling of values to a common standard. Not only are moral differences among characters sharply reduced but possible options open to them in the sphere of ethical action as well. One value seems to infect the others . . .[1]

In other words, the characters of *esperpento* are robbed of the comfort that their troubles are attributable to fateful, if not in fact divine, forces beyond their control at the same time that they are deprived of the social affirmation that comes at the end of comedy in the form of marriage and family feasting. Several times during *Ay, Carmela!*, for

[1] Bert O. States, *Irony and Drama: A Poetics* (Ithaca, New York, 1971), p. 75.

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example, Carmela—who took her wedding vows before a justice of the peace—expresses her desire to be married in a Catholic church and her regret at never having overruled Paulino's objection to conceiving a child out of their vibrantly sexual relationship; her husband, who once trained for the priesthood, promises her a church wedding if only she will dutifully perform her role in their new pro-Franco show, a role that Carmela resists not only out of her loyalty to the Republic but also out of menstrual melancholy. But Carmela never gets her church wedding (or a Catholic burial, for that matter), nor do we ever see her and Paulino pray to God for solace or participate in the solemn feast of the Eucharist. In fact, at what is a feast for this hungry pair—spaghetti with a glass of wine, provided by the Falangists—Carmela quips, "If the Fascists always eat as well as this, we've lost the war." One vision seems to infect the other in this film and other works of *esperpento*: the comic attitude mocks the serious, and the serious attitude whittles away at the comic. The result: a world bereft of both the consolation of a divine or at least deterministic framework and the benefit of a restored social order, plus a world in which moral differences as well as ethical options are reduced to such an extent that Paulino can appear to be a Fascist collaborator, Lieutenant Ripamonte a benign figure of fun, and Carmela a sentimental hysteric.

Early on we get the first evidence that *Ay, Carmela!* is not going to be just another film about the good fight against the evil of Fascism. Paulino follows Carmela on stage in Aragon and fervently recites a patriotic poem by Antonio Machado, after which the crowd abruptly calls for his "farting routine." Paulino has apparently passed gas on demand in previous shows and now does so again to great applause! Moral gravity has been punctured by coarse buffoonery in a way that makes us question, not the film's seriousness, but the world's—the sound judgment, the good faith, the social compact of a world at war, terribly divided against itself and therefore terribly willing to accommodate, in the name of victory, juxtapostions of the high and low, the exalted and the ignoble, the life force and the death wish. At least twice during *Ay, Carmela!* actual death scenes follow on the heels of scenes of liveliness: as a handsome Pole innocently courts Carmela right before Paulino's bulging eyes in a makeshift Falangist prison, several Republicans are selected at random from their midst, taken outside, and put to death before a firing squad; the morning after their raucous, diverting visit to the Teatro Goya for Carmela and Paulino's performance, the Polish members of the International Brigade are shot, which means that, although Saura does not show their murders, they die at about the time Carmela is buried.

One of the men killed during the execution that Saura does film is the town's Communist mayor, and it is in his captured house that Carmela and the ever amorous Paulino, who are supposed to be rehearsing, have sex after her initial reluctance to do so on the bed of

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a dead man, especially when that man and his wife appear to look down at them from photographs on the wall! So obsessed with bedding Carmela is Paulino that together they create a pet term for sexual intercourse—"taking a trip to Uruguay"—and use it as the title of a courtship dance they do as part of their theatrical act. Immediately upon seeing them do their mating dance on the stage of the Teatro Goya, we listen to a chorus of Italian soldiers, led by Lieutenant Ripamonte, sing a song in honor of their comrades who have fallen in battle—a song whose solemnity is undercut by its own singers, whom a Spanish colonel calls "fairies" and who hop onto and off the stage like a bunch of rabbits. The grotesqueness of this juxtaposition, and of other such juxtapositions in *Ay, Carmela!*, is aesthetically jarring, is deracinating, if you will, and one could argue that by deracinating or distancing his audience Saura felt he could get it to look at the Spanish Civil War, and war in general, with fresh eyes—eyes otherwise accustomed for the most part to moral platitudes and cinematic clichés when it comes to the treatment of this subject.

In keeping with *esperpento*'s essentially detached view of humanity, Saura keeps his camera mostly in the medium-to-full range and is not afraid to hold it on characters instead of cutting among them for visual variety. When he does cut, it is usually for dramatic emphasis; when his camera travels, it often does so as a newsreel camera would, in order to explore a scene of wreckage, a crowd of frightened people, a shelter full of occupied beds. What "visual variety" we get in *Ay, Carmela!* comes from the work of Saura's cinematographer, José Luis Alcaine, and even here the variety does not exist for its own sake. Alcaine tends to give us dark, rich, solidly illuminated hues in and around the theatre and pale, dreary, even mist-obscured hues outside it, which is one way of contrasting the theatre's life and creativity with the death and destruction that convulse the world, or of suggesting that, in this film, the drama of the Spanish Civil War will be played out where its essence can best be distilled: upon a bare, well-lighted stage. Carmen Maura and Andrés Pajares enact that drama, with an able assist from Gabino Diego as Gustavete, and both know how to create comic interest at the same time that they intimate psychological depth—not an easy task even for otherwise highly skilled actors.

Ay, Carmela! succeeds because it does not sacrifice character to allegorical design, because it is content to let its characters live in history instead of in the service of history or politics. The same cannot be said for Pavel Lounguine's *Taxi Blues*, the first film to be directed by this forty-year-old Russian, from his own script, after an initial career devoted exclusively to screenwriting. *Taxi Blues* recounts the strange yet predictable relationship between Lyosha Seliverstov, a debauched Jewish jazz musician, and Ivan Chlykov, a bigoted Moscow cabdriver as well as small-scale black marketeer. They meet when, after a night of drunken partying, Lyosha takes Chlykov's cab home

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and then stiffs him for the fare of seventy rubles. The next day, Chlykov traces the musician to the Blue Note Club—where he sometimes plays—gives him a beating, and seizes Lyosha himself as collateral for his debt, which soon rises to 545 rubles when he floods Chlykov's seedy apartment during a long, raucous bath. To repay the money he owes, Lyosha is forced to give up his fashionable Western clothes, work as a porter at the airport, and wash taxicabs. Chlykov's plan is not only to get his money back, but also to instill moral and social responsibility in the effete Lyosha, to make a man of him through hard work together with good nutrition and regular exercise. The plan goes awry, however, for this bohemian feels responsibility in the end only to his music and his drinking, despite the blossoming of a begrudging friendship between him and the cabbie, of a love to complement their mutual hatred. No, these two are not latent homosexuals who bring each other out of the closet—not in this political allegory, anyway; each has a lady friend with whom he alternately quarrels and copulates, and Lyosha is nearly seduced by Chlykov's girl as well.

Lyosha is rescued from his virtual enslavement to Chlykov by the perfect—or better, pat—complement to this allegory of the worker and the artist-intellectual: a black American jazz musician and his white manager, who take Lyosha back to the United States, where he plays his by turns plaintive and frenetic saxophone (which also recorded the film's score) to great acclaim, then returns to Moscow a star and bids farewell to his former master. Naturally, the master resists the breakup because, by this time, he has become the enslaved one—enslaved to the idea that his relationship with Lyosha has helped make the latter a success, and that the artist needs the proletarian as much as Chlykov needs him. But the anarchic Lyosha doesn't need anybody, and his success is attributable only to *glasnost* and his own musical talent. That is, the saxophonist's success was made possible by the *breakdown* of Communism, not by the long-awaited consolidation of the bond between workers and intellectuals in the ideal socialist state. And American jazz, as adopted by this Russian, is an expression, not of underclass rebellion against the capitalist system (as Soviet musicologists would like to think), but, paradoxically, of both aesthetic rebellion against *all* systems, be they musical or governmental, and commercial embrace of any system that will nourish its existence.

From a title at the end of *Taxi Blues*, we learn that Lyosha has already recorded his second album in New York and that Chlykov now owns his own fleet of cabs—no more black-marketeering for him in the age of *perestroika*. Capitalism has won out, in other words, and it has done so—as it does everywhere, the film implies—at the expense of human relations, of solidarity among the members of an ultimately classless, egalitarian society. Lyosha is headed in one direction by the end of *Taxi Blues* and Chlykov in another, but not before trying to avenge what he perceives as the saxophonist's betrayal of their

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"partnership." Appropriately, he seeks his revenge through a car chase, the supreme metaphor for capitalist competition and a staple of American popular cinema. After the returned musical hero shows up quite late for a party in his honor at Chlykov's apartment and then abruptly leaves with his entourage, the cabbie races after him through the streets of pre-dawn Moscow, leaving chaos and destruction in his wake. Finally, he rams a Mercedes Benz he believes to be Lyosha's, only to discover, amidst fire and explosion, that the man lying dead inside is a Japanese!

Like other political allegories from the Soviet Union, *Taxi Blues* is for the most part hyperbolic and transparent, from its shooting style to the content of its scenes to its delineation of character. Under the opening credits, for example, we hear—for no reason—the sound of fireworks; then, almost equally without reason, we get a montage of the streets of Moscow, via a handheld camera, before the narrative proper begins. And too often during the film Lounguine italicizes his meaning by slowly tracking in to a close-up of a character. Denis Yevstigneyev's color cinematography itself is not bad, but shooting locations seem to have been chosen too pointedly to display either maximum grittiness, on the one hand—the city dump, the railroad tracks—or maximum garishness, on the other—a prison cell painted blue that holds the pale, drunken Lyosha and two painted ladies, a gigantic screen along a Moscow thoroughfare that transmits a television performance by the newly celebrated saxophonist. Lounguine's screenplay does not help matters, since it insists on literalizing the conflict between Lyosha and Chlykov instead of letting that conflict speak for itself through their actions. For instance, after the musician becomes so desperate for alcohol that he drinks after-shave, the cabbie asks, "Even Jews sell out for booze?"—to which Lyosha replies, "You drove us to it." To whom does "you" refer? In case we missed it, Lyosha has told us earlier: to the workers, whom he drunkenly describes as "honest folk with clear eyes . . . our only hope. [They'd] thrive in sub-zero weather in Siberia without matches." Lounguine's idea of delineating his worker's character is to have Chlykov sing a patriotic, even militaristic, song, declare that nobody loves him, then slam an axe into sides of beef hanging in the butcher shop where his girlfriend works—all of this in response to being snubbed by Lyosha at the Moscow airport, where the cabbie has gone to pick up the saxophonist upon his return from America. Lyosha's own character is revealed, so to speak, when he appears naked: once while he plays the saxophone all alone in Chlykov's apartment, and a second time on the subway. His nudity tells us that he yearns to be free from all constraints; then, just to make sure that Lounguine's point doesn't escape us, Lyosha proclaims his freedom aloud to his fellow passengers aboard the train.

Lyosha is played without subtlety—largely because there is no subtlety in the character that Lounguine drew—by Pyotr Mamonov,

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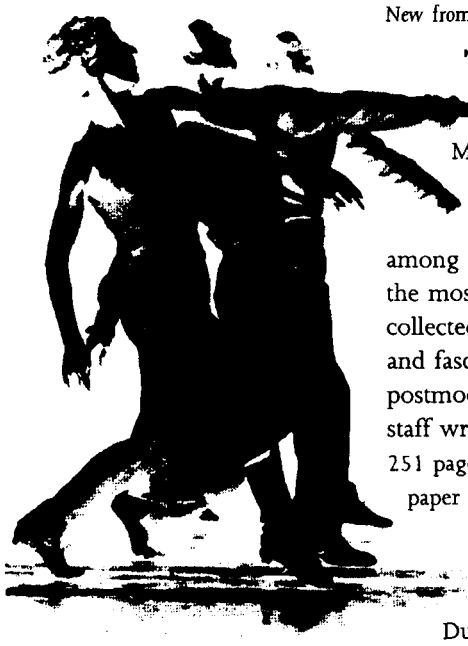
the leader of a Russian rock group called "Zvouki-Mu" (for which he sings as well as plays saxophone) and a dead ringer for the young Bert Brecht. Pyotr Zaichenko performs the role of the sturdy, laconic Chlykov with all the earnestness he can muster, which is plenty, but, unfortunately, earnestness is all he is given to play. Funny Chlykov is not, nor is Lyosha, though I have read critics who commend the "surreal humor" and "grotesque realism" of *Taxi Blues*. The only humor in this film is pathetic, the kind you get when a drunk tries to make people laugh. One example: among the souvenirs Lyosha has brought back from America is an inflatable, life-sized, anatomically correct doll, which he bestows upon the hapless Chlykov—amidst roars of laughter from the other characters—just before leaving the party that the cabbie has thrown in his, Lyosha's, honor; after the departure of his guests, Chlykov stands all alone in the middle of his apartment, the doll at his side and a samurai movie playing on television in the background, as Lounguine's camera tracks mercilessly in on him. Yes, this scene also has an element of the grotesque about it, but only in the shallowest sense of the word: ridiculous. The grotesque is a posture in *Taxi Blues*, in other words, whereas in *Ay, Carmela!* it is an article of faith.



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RICHARD HORNBY

Death of a Musical Comedy

YOU CAN TELL THAT A BROADWAY SHOW IS IN TROUBLE when which of the following is true? A) The opening is repeatedly postponed. B) The producers start complaining about the high costs of putting on musicals these days. C) The press agents insist that all the rewriting is just the final polish of a basically perfect script. D) The newspapers print stories about the performers' sex lives rather than about the show itself. In the case of *Nick and Nora*, a musical based on the "Thin Man" movies that opened and closed in the same week last December, after two months of previews, the answer is "all of the above."

No one was sorrier than I was to see *Nick and Nora* flop, not even the investors. It seemed, at long last, an ideal combination for an American musical: the 1930s and 1940s films (there were six of them), based on a mystery novel by Dashiell Hammett, are urbane, witty, and engrossing. They were adapted for the stage in this instance by Arthur Laurents, who wrote the books for *West Side Story* and the resplendent *Gypsy*. The music was by Charles Strouse (*Bye Bye Birdie*, *Annie*), with lyrics by Richard Maltby, Jr. (*Miss Saigon, Baby*). Nick and Nora were played by Barry Bostwick and Joanna Gleason, two superb performers who have both won more awards than they can probably fit on their mantelpieces. Douglas W. Schmidt designed spectacular scenery that beautifully evoked Hollywood in 1937, as did Theoni V. Aldredge's stylish costumes.

What went wrong? As always in the theatre, strengths and weaknesses can be traced back to the script. The books for musicals are hardly literary masterpieces (though a few, like *Oklahoma!, Guys and Dolls*, or *Gypsy*, come close), but successful ones tell a clear, simple story based on fundamental longings: boy wants girl, performer wants stardom, street gangs want power. In *Nick and Nora*, it was hard to tell what anyone wanted. Critics complained that the murder plot was overly complicated; actually, it was no more intricate than those of thousands of murder-mystery plays, including one that has been running in London for thirty-five years. The problem was that no one in the play seemed much *interested* in the plot. In the novels and films, Nick and Nora Charles may digress and indulge in sophisticated banter, but it is always clear that there has been a murder committed, and that they want very much to find out who done it. In Laurents' script for the musical, and in the performances of the actors (for which Laurents must bear partial blame, since he also directed), the

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focus was all on style for its own sake. There were martinis and champagne, there was the famous dog Asta, there was elegant ballroom dancing (choreographed by Tina Paul), there were worldly put-downs, but the murder itself was just another event in a disconnected phantasmagoria. It was hard to remember who was who in the large, disjointed cast, much less care about which one had committed the murder. Every scene went off in a different direction: at one point, Nora made a big fuss about Nick never involving her in his murder-solving (like Lucy complaining that Ricky won't let her be in the show); at another point, one of the murder suspects fell in love with Nora; in a flashback, the female murder victim, whose sexuality had seemed unambiguous, suddenly got into a passionate embrace with her maid. None of these gimmicks developed into anything, thus only serving, again, to distract our attention from the murder.

The music for the show had a similarly aimless quality, most of it sounding like endless recitative. Strouse and Maltby interwove a lot of the songs with the dialogue, which was a big mistake; they even put elements of plot into the musical numbers, which only served to make the plot more obscure than ever. In American musical comedy, as opposed to opera or operetta, the music stops the plot rather than advances it. The action rises to an emotional peak that is expressed through song. This is the reason for the traditional form of songs in musicals, as first developed by Irving Berlin, who downgraded the verse into something relatively short, talky, and musically unassuming, in order to enhance the chorus, which he lengthened from the traditional eight or sixteen bars to thirty-two, and invested with energy and distinctiveness.[1] (Thus, you probably cannot even remember the verse parts of most popular songs, jumping instead into the chorus if you want to sing one.) The reason for the form was dramatic; the verse now served as a bridge between the dialogue and the song, making a smooth transition from one mode of expression to the other. Without such a transition, the singing seems unmotivated and intrusive—and, in the end, confusing, as it certainly was in *Nick and Nora*.

The American musical comedy seems all but dead these days. The only two successful ones currently running are nostalgia pieces: *City of Angels*, a private-eye thriller set in the 1940s, with an intricate plot that nonetheless works; and *The Will Rogers Follies*, a charming show loosely based on the *Ziegfeld Follies*. The other big musical hits of recent years are actually operettas, like *Grand Hotel*, or opera itself, like *Les Misérables*, *The Phantom of the Opera*, and *Miss Saigon*. Such shows are placed in exotic foreign locales, and typically have a grandiose romantic plot. The music is similarly inflated, with lyrics

[1] Laurence Bergreen, *As Thousands Cheer: The Life of Irving Berlin* (New York, 1990), pp. 39–40. This wonderful biography is a gold mine of information about the American popular song and musical comedy.

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and dialogue that are relatively unimportant (in opera, of course, there is rarely any spoken dialogue); the story is told instead through a series of musical vignettes. Thus, you can watch an opera sung in a foreign language and still understand the gist of what is going on, because the music actually carries the plot, instead of just expressing its emotional high points.

In musical comedy, by contrast, the settings and characters are distinctively American. The plots are more realistic, with a tone that is more satirical than sentimental. Dialogue and lyrics are both very important (when music and lyrics are written by different people, they typically split the money fifty-fifty); it is thus impossible to imagine a foreign audience being able to follow what was going on in *Guys and Dolls* or *Gypsy* unless they were translated. Even then, such shows are so thoroughly American that they would still be hard for foreigners to understand. Thus I felt, hopefully, that the "Thin Man" films were excellent material for a musical comedy, with their uniquely American characters and attitudes, and strongly verbal wit.

As for the music, in musical comedy these are—or rather, were—simply theatrical adaptations of the American popular song. Berlin, Porter, Rodgers, and Gershwin were writing for Tin Pan Alley as well as for the Broadway stage. Their songs were published soon after their shows had opened, and were sung not only by professional jazz singers, but by ordinary folk around their home pianos and in the shower. This connection with the songs of everyday life made the music of the musical comedy, like the characters and plots, seem quintessentially American. The characters on the stage were our surrogates, behaving as we would like to behave, singing as we would like to sing.

Irving Berlin was already complaining in the 1930s that we were changing from a nation of singers into a nation of listeners. The phonograph was not too bad, he felt, since people played the songs over and over and would sing along, but the radio was making American listeners passive. Today, with our home audio systems, car stereos, boom boxes, and Walkmen, we have forgotten how to sing. Furthermore, the onset of rock has given us a style of music that you usually *cannot* sing. (Imagine trying to sing along at a Heavy Metal rock concert.) Perhaps this is why the American musical comedy seems to be dying, and ultimately why *Nick and Nora* died. Characters cannot sing for us, when we no longer sing ourselves.

Tony Randall, now an energetic septuagenarian, has founded a National Actors Theatre to perform the classics on Broadway with some of America's best actors. The first production, of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, though not without flaws, was certainly promising.

Whether one should call Miller's play a classic is debatable. Although it and *Death of a Salesman* are his best-known works, neither is as good as some of his later ones, such as *A View from the Bridge*, *The*

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Price, or *The American Clock*. *Crucible* has some powerful scenes, but it is long-winded and repetitive, uses a phony colonial dialect, and is arguably sexist. It tells the story of an honest, upright farmer, John Proctor, who is caught up in the hysteria of the Salem witch trials of 1692, and condemned to death. When the play was first performed, in 1953, critics saw it as an allegory of the McCarthy hearings and the anti-Communist hysteria of the time. Actually, however, as Miller shapes the story, the ultimate cause of Proctor's problems is his wife's frigidity; as a result, he had a one-time encounter with their beautiful servant, Abigail, an amoral slut who denounces Proctor's wife as a witch in order to have him for herself. Things get out of hand, so that Proctor ends up going to the gallows, while Abigail robs the local minister and takes it on the lam.

With what we now know of Miller's own life, it is all too easy to see the play not as a political allegory, but as a personal one. Proctor, who is so gosh-awful decent and aw-shucks honest, stands for Miller himself, while Proctor's wife is Miller's first wife, and Abigail the Marilyn Monroe whom Miller was soon to take up with. At any rate, the play presents females as the root of all evil, not just the two women in Proctor's life, but the hysterical girls who denounce half the town for supposed witchcraft.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the play has a theatrical potency. It is slow getting off the ground (this production wisely cut an entire scene), but the trial scene is a humdinger, full of breathtaking reversals, until finally Proctor's wife, by lying to try to save him, unwittingly condemns him to death. The large National Actors Theatre cast played all this to the full. Martin Sheen was a superb Proctor; he radiates the same kind of sincerity and moral integrity on stage as the actor in the original production, the late Arthur Kennedy, who had also played Biff in *Salesman*. Maryann Plunkett was equally strong as Elizabeth Proctor, the wife, while Fritz Weaver as Deputy-Governor Danforth, the trial judge, had both the looks and the power of an Old Testament prophet. My only quarrel with the casting concerned Madeleine Potter, whose gawky figure and pinched face made her too homely for Abigail, though perhaps we might believe that Proctor was so sex-starved as to submit to the first available female who came along.

Patricia Zipprodt designed well-founded costumes for the play; avoiding the historically false cliché of dressing Puritans only in dark homespun, she expressed class and occupational distinctions by a wide range of colors and fabrics, including prints and silks. David Jenkins' setting for the play used real, bare tree trunks as a permanent background, which suggested not only the primeval New England forest, but also a cathedral. In front of this was a bare, sloping platform, which the director, Yossi Yzraely, handled awkwardly. He used only a minimal amount of furniture to suggest the various locales, which may be historically accurate, but which left the stage

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unarticulated and vague. As a result, the blocking was terrible, especially in the crowd scenes, where actors were scattered about randomly, often covering one another. Some of the fault, however, can be traced back to Miller's script; for reasons I have never been able to fathom, he set the big trail scene not in the courtroom, but in an antechamber, thus denying the director the use of a dais, witness stand, benches, etc., which are as useful in a theatre as they are in a courtroom itself.

All in all, *The Crucible* was an encouraging beginning for this new, serious American theatre company. This century has seen any number of such companies come and go—the New Theatre, the Provincetown Players, the Theatre Guild, the Civic Repertory, the Mercury Theatre, the Group Theatre, and the Phoenix Theatre, to name only a few. With better material and better directors, perhaps, like most other civilized countries, we will at last have a truly national theatre.

A similar problem of choice of material could be seen in George C. Scott's decision to direct and star in Paul Osborn's *On Borrowed Time,* at the uptown Circle in the Square. Scott is a magnificent theatre actor, a rare example of a genuine American movie star who is even better on stage than he is on screen. Some thirty years ago he played Richard III and Shylock outdoors (before the advent of miking) in Central Park, where his powerful voice, expressive body, strong features, and magnificent eyes established him as a great Shakespearean actor. Today, his rare appearances in the theatre are occasions to drop everything and run to the box office, but do not expect to see him in anything significant. He should be playing roles like John Gabriel Borkman or James Tyrone or King Lear, but instead we get crusty old "Gramps" in this Osborn trifle.

Osborn, a minor playwright with some major successes, was born in 1901, and is apparently still alive. A student of George Pierce Baker at Yale, who taught a whole generation of American playwrights including Eugene O'Neill, Osborn was active from the late twenties until the sixties. Perhaps his most memorable work, which places him as a writer, was his 1950s stage adaptation of the novel, *The World of Suzie Wong*, which became known around New York as "The World of Woozy Song." *On Borrowed Time*, also adapted from a novel (by L. E. Watkin), was written in 1938; it tells the whimsical story of a grandfather and his adoring, orphaned grandson, who encounter Death in human form, and trick him up an apple tree, where he is unable to escape. As a result, death is suspended throughout the universe, which leads to much homily about the importance of death, until both the boy and the old man kick the bucket together, a final exit that is shown to be about as traumatic as a trip to the Catskills. Scott was, of course, wonderful as the grandfather, and the boy (Matthew Porac) wasn't bad either. But what a waste.

The Roundabout Theatre Company, which has had a number of

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venues in its twenty-six-year history, moved this past fall to Broadway, into a new theatre called the Criterion. Other Broadway houses built in the past two decades are visually and acoustically odious, but the Criterion, a small theatre with a semi-thrust stage, is pleasant and functional. The same might be said of the Roundabout's first production there, an innocuous revival of Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming*. There were some good individual performances, especially by Roy Dotrice as the abusive old father, but that unique brooding, dreamlike "Pinteresque" atmosphere was lacking. The play seemed to be merely about an odd cockney family with criminal tendencies, a "Lavender Hill Mob" without the comedy.

The story in *The Homecoming* is simple but weird: a retired London butcher named Max is living in the same house with his brother Sam, and his two sons Lenny and Joey. Max's wife is dead. Sam works as a chauffeur; Joey is an aspiring boxer, while Lenny, we ultimately learn, is a pimp. Into the family home comes a third brother, Teddy, and his wife Ruth; they are on a visit from the United States, where Teddy has become (of all things for a member of such a family!) a professor of philosophy. Lenny tries to intimidate Ruth; Max tries to intimidate Teddy, and calls Ruth a whore; Ruth apparently seduces Joey. In the end, Lenny is going to set Ruth up as a prostitute in one of his Soho flats, while Teddy will return to the U.S. Sam drops dead of a heart attack and is left lying on the floor, and Max, realizing that Ruth is actually taking over control of the house, also collapses.

All this grotesque behavior is presented in such a deadpan fashion that the play seems like slice-of-life naturalism, even though the life being depicted could not conceivably exist. But where bizarre activities are underplayed, simple events like the ticking of a clock, drinking a glass of water, or the movement of a leg take on fabulous dimensions. Characters dwell on such trivial things endlessly, suggesting that they have some hidden significance, which Pinter wisely never spells out.

In order for Pinter's odd, poetic form of drama to work on stage, several things are necessary: First, timing must be precise. Not only must the actors meticulously observe the famous "Pinter pauses," but they must also be careful not to *add* pauses where Pinter does not want them. Second, the actors must of course continue to communicate during the pauses, with a look, a touch, a gesture. In the Roundabout production, directed by Gordon Edelstein, the actors seemed to ignore Pinter's stage directions entirely, pausing at whim, and seemed to do little during the pauses but recall their next lines. But most important of all with Pinter, actors must focus relentlessly on those small objects and gestures that are so important to the characters. When Vivien Merchant spoke the following lines as Ruth twenty-five years ago, I recall it as one of the sexiest moments I have ever seen on any stage:

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> Look at me. I . . . move my leg. That's all it is. But I wear . . . underwear . . . which moves with me . . . it . . . captures your attention.

It is a strange speech, threatening as well as sexual, an evocation of feminine mystery. (A lesser writer would have had Ruth say "lingerie," instead of the blunt "underwear," but Pinter always takes the banal and *makes* it strange.) When Lindsay Crouse, a more attractive woman physically than Merchant, spoke these lines, however, there was no mystery at all; she might as well have been reading from a laundry list.

In sum, this *Homecoming* exhibited the strengths and flaws that have been typical of the Roundabout productions I have seen over the years. They are a well-intentioned group, dedicated to producing modern classics in a straightforward manner, which automatically shoots them ahead of all the gimmick-prone companies that abound. But the poetic elements of theatre seem not only outside their abilities, but outside their comprehension.

Speaking of theatre companies, the best show in New York this past fall was Brian Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*, performed by Dublin's visiting Abbey Theatre. The last time the Abbey were here, in 1988, it was with a performance art piece so amateurish and pretentious that even enthusiasts of the avant-garde still shake their heads in sorrow over it. At the time, I despaired that the company, some 90 years old and heir to the great tradition of Yeats, Lady Gregory, Synge, and O'Casey, had become senile. It is a relief to be able to report that they can still inspire fine playwriting, and act with subtlety and intensity.

Dancing at Lughnasa is a memory play, a kind of Irish *Glass Menagerie*. Michael, the narrator, recalls a period in his childhood, in early August of 1936. He was living with his mother and four aunts in a cottage in County Donegal; the time sticks in his memory because they had just got their first radio, and because his uncle Jack had just returned from Africa, where he had been a Catholic priest and missionary. It was also the time of the Irish pagan Feast of Lughnasa, after Lugh, the Celtic god of the harvest.

Lughnasa is pronounced LOO-na-sa, and sounds like "lunacy," which it certainly seems in repressed, Catholic Ireland of the depression years. The action of the play, such as it is, involves the contrast between modern Irish life, which is seen as stultified and sterile, and its rich pagan heritage, which erupts in numerous ways, most often in dancing, from country clogging to ballroom foxtrot. On the one hand, none of the family is married, an all-too-typical situation in modern Ireland; on the other, Michael is the result of his mother's liaison with a charming Welsh rascal, who has a final dance with her before going off to Spain to fight in the International Brigade. The

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missionary Uncle Jack is a priest, but he was sent home from Africa because he had "gone native." Cheerfully demonstrating African ceremonies, while avoiding saying mass, he has spoken Swahili so long that he has trouble remembering English. He delights in Michael, his sister's "love child": "In Ryanga women are eager to have love-children. The more love-children you have, the more fortunate your household is thought to be."

Like the dance music on the radio, which fades in and out, this golden pagan summer died away. The sisters lost their jobs knitting gloves, two of them leaving home and dying in terrible poverty. Dotty old Uncle Jack died within a year, and Michael's mother spent the rest of her life working in a factory, hating every day of it. All that remains of the time and its people is Michael's memory, where "everybody seems to be floating on those sweet sounds, moving rhythmically, languorously, in complete isolation; responding more to the mood of the music than to its beat."

In the past, I have found Friel's plays—e.g., *Philadelphia Here I Come*, *Aristocrats*—strong on characterization and Irish ambience, but static and talky. *Dancing at Lughnasa* is static and talky too, but the characters are so vivid, the language so lyrical, and the undercurrents so strong that the lack of overt plot is a strength. It is a memory play, and the function of the narrator's memory is to stop the action, to examine and understand it. In this way, the play reminded me of that wonderful Civil War television series last year, where the camera moved endlessly over hundreds of still photographs; the photos did not move, but the viewer's mind did.

Both the structure of the play and the consistent high levels of performances make it hard to single out any of the actors. Gerard McSorley was laudable as Michael, successfully playing the character as a seven-year-old (without any change of costume or makeup) and in middle age. Donal Donnelly was marvelous as sickly, childlike, sly Uncle Jack, and all five actresses playing the sisters—Catherine Byrne, Dearbhla Molloy, Bríd Brennan, Bríd Ní Neachtain, Rosaleen Linehan—were warm, distinctive, complex, and eloquently Irish. Robert Gwilym was terrific as Michael's ne'er-do-well father, and Patrick Mason directed with an orchestral sense of the play's verbal music. The only weakness in the production was Joe Vaněk's ugly set, a jaundice-yellow plaster backdrop with a lot of real wheat planted in front; a memory play certainly requires stylization, but this one requires beauty as well. Nonetheless, the acting area in front of this ostentation was well laid out, with excellent period props, and the ensemble acting was so fine that the performers could have hung from trapezes and still made this lovely play work.

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ROBERT S. CLARK

Music Chronicle

ONE OF THE BENEFITS OF LIVING CLOSE TO A CULTURAL HUB such as New York City is the opportunity to hear, within the span of a few months, several renderings of a single musical work. It is a benefit unique to our time, a concomitant of the jet age, widening worldwide prosperity and the democratization of the West's music schools. Hardly a season passes these days that does not offer the alert listener several such opportunities, reaching beyond mere repetition of chestnuts—Beethoven's "Kreutzer" Sonata or Brahms's First Symphony. On Carnegie Hall's current calendar, for example, are two performances within six months of Shostakovich's rarely heard Eighth Symphony.

Since September New York's musical cornucopia has afforded three occasions to hear an idiosyncratic work by (inevitably, this year) Mozart: his Trio in E-flat, K. 498, for Clarinet, Viola and Piano, called "*Kegelstatt*." The celebration of the bicentennial of Mozart's death has come and—mercifully—gone. It has shown us what we already largely knew: a composer always facile and captivating, one with an almost uncanny knack, manifested at an astonishingly early age, for knowing how a musical period should begin, proceed and come to an end, and often something more—a composer whose facility is the instrument of revelation.

The "*Kegelstatt*" Trio is not of the latter kind. But neither is it of the kind that led Kingsley Amis to pen the epithet "the endless facetiousness of filthy Mozart"—a class of works the charm of which seems too insistent and the procedures of which seem too glib. The trio's material is, to these ears, extraordinarily attractive, and its manipulation is consistently concentrated, engrossing and free of that archness that irritated Amis. The unusual instrumental combination lends the trio an added piquancy, but in spite of this, Stanley Sadie (in *Grove's Dictionary*) rightly notes that it ranks among "the most unified in feeling" of Mozart's works.

Written in 1786, the year of *Figaro*, the trio derives its nickname, which translates as the eighteenth-century Viennese equivalent of "bowling alley," from an unverified tale that Mozart wrote it while playing a game of skittles at such an establishment. The tale is plausible, because Mozart was known to have carried complete scores around in his head until conditions permitted him to set them down on paper. Still, the piece is full of felicities that suggest creative processes of a more reflective kind. The final phrase of the first

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subject of the exposition, for instance, becomes—minus its arresting turn, an alternation of a median note with those just above and below it—the opening phrase of the second subject. The second movement combines the traditional minuet with three-section aria form. And into the rondo finale, whose principal theme is itself a variant of the first-movement opening, Mozart introduces both the ornamented first-movement theme and a series of viola triplets that marked the second movement. But whatever the truth of its origins, the trio probably owes its distinctive character to the fact that the composer wrote it for private performance—for his friend the clarinetist Anton Stadler, his pupil the pianist Franziska von Jacquin, in whose home it was first played, and himself on the viola.

The three performances I heard all did justice to the work's rapid-fire imitation and variation, and, in varying degrees, to its intimate scale. Paradoxically, it was in the largest of the venues—Carnegie Hall—that the interplay among the instrumentalists seemed liveliest.

The first performance was part of a series at Columbia University's Kathryn Bache Miller Theater, featuring Menahem Pressler, pianist of the Beaux Arts Trio, and the New York Chamber Soloists. Coyly labelled "the Menahem and Mozart Festival"—the anniversary year spawned an excess of such cuteness—the series' three concerts were entirely given over to the composer's chamber music and piano concertos.

Pressler's opening notes set the tone for the whole: this was to be a relaxed approach, delicate and sometimes a little affected, the sort that might ensue if three amateur musicians got together for an evening of playing. Pressler's piano was clearly the leader, and sometimes the shapeliness of his phrases and the fleetness of his passagework were not quite matched by his partners on the viola and clarinet. Ensemble was less than total, and though Pressler liked wide dynamic variation within periods and even phrases, the other instruments' repetition of them softened the contrast. Moderate as the tempos were, the viola's entries often slowed them even further, and a touch of the precious sometimes disfigured Pressler's playing—frequently signalled by his habit of arching an eyebrow at phrase's end. The reading was professional but not masterly, accomplished but unfinished. Ynez Lynch was the violist and Alan R. Kay the clarinetist.

The best music of the evening did not involve Pressler. It was a sprightly rendition of the Flute Quartet in D Major, K. 285, led by David Fedele's exceptional flute playing, in which the dash of his phrasing and his well judged dynamics seemed to invigorate his companions.

The trio next cropped up in Carnegie's large auditorium, as one item in a "Mozart celebration" by the pianist Murray Perahia and "friends," including Harold Wright on the clarinet and Shmuel Ashkenazi on the viola. Here the performers seemed more nearly

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equals, exchanging comment on their shared material in an easygoing way that never became self-conscious or routine. Though manipulated gently and alive with nuance, the music had a natural pulse and sustained flow. Wright's finely modulated tone illuminated his phrases throughout. Particularly in the second and final movements, the resiny utterance of Ashkenazi's viola set it off exquisitely, the maturest voice of the three but with no lack of energy. Perahia was more refined but never affected: his phrases spoke with an unsullied directness and his chordal support and passagework at once cushioned and propelled his partners.

The evening continued with Perahia accompanying the soprano Arleen Auger in six of Mozart's songs, two from 1785 and four from 1787, including the remarkable *Lied der Trennung* and *Abendempfindung*. Miss Auger's tone was lovely to hear and admirably controlled, and the words came across clearly. But she polished these gems to such a high gloss as to rob them of all spontaneity. This was singing-school perfection, all command and no character, and ultimately dull. Members of the Vermeer Quartet joined Perahia in an energetic and idiomatic reading of the Quartet in G Minor, K. 478, to close the concert.

The last of the three performances was given in Carnegie's handsomely refurbished Weill Recital Hall, the compact dimensions of which are all but ideal for the trio. Even the notoriously dry acoustic of the hall enhanced the work's impact: the listener was in direct contact with the sound of the instruments, unimpeded by the filtering effect that resonance can have. The performers, all young (or youngish), were clarinetist David Shifrin, violist Paul Neubauer and pianist Margo Garrett.

Though Shifrin's rich and elegantly modulated tone was in stark contrast to Garrett's muscular keyboard style, the three managed to find a musical consensus that served the give and take well. The opening *Andante* was slower in tempo and gentler in attack than the corresponding movement heard next door, and here and there it was possible to feel that these instrumentalists were caressing the music a bit too lovingly. But their sounds were nicely balanced, and their collective musicianship was strong enough to bring their individual styles into a satisfying blend.

Also on the program were four of Max Bruch's *Eight Pieces* for the three instruments, Debussy's *Première Rapsodie* for Clarinet and Piano, and Hindemith's Sonata in F Major, Op. 11, No. 4, for Viola and Piano. All were given strong and accomplished renderings, especially the Hindemith, which profited from Neubauer's bright tone, instrumental mastery and intellectual finesse.

The current focus of New York's musical chat is Kurt Masur, who began his tenure as musical director of the New York Philharmonic as the fall season opened. I will defer comment to a later issue, for my only recent encounter with the Philharmonic at this writing was not

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with the full orchestra but with a group of its players in a New York Philharmonic Ensembles concert at Merkin Hall. The afternoon got off to a slightly rocky start with some less than perfect accord and some breathy flute tone in Telemann's Trio Sonata for Flute (Renee Siebert), Bassoon (David Carroll), Cello (Nancy Donaruma) and Harpsichord (Harriet Wingreen). But these professionals soon righted matters and turned in a fleet performance distinguished by some nicely graded dynamics. Next came a good small-scale reading of Mozart's Trio for Violin (Hanna Lachert), Cello (Donaruma) and Piano (Lev Natochenny), K. 502, in which the Steinway's plummy tone sometimes seemed a little bullying.

The first half closed with the program's zenith: a memorable rendering of Bartók's *Contrasts* for Clarinet (Stanley Drucker), Violin (Donald Whyte) and Piano (Itmar Golan). The legendary difficulties of the work were met by Drucker, the Philharmonic's first clarinetist, with the kind of fluency that explains why he has been at the forefront of the city's instrumental cadres for decades. Whyte, who early in the performance was rather too tame, rose to the challenge of his long cadenza in the final *Sebes* (Fast Dance) with breathtaking skill. And the young pianist almost stole the show in a part not as extraverted as the other two—which, not incidentally, were written for Benny Goodman and Josef Szigeti. These players deservedly received an ovation the like of which I have seldom heard in recent seasons.

After intermission five string players (violinists Kerry McDermott and Gary Levinson, violists Irene Breslaw and Judith Nelson, and cellist Alan Stepansky) brought a high decibel level and high tension to Brahms's Quintet in G Major, Op. 111. The diminutive McDermott's lead violin was the engine, and if some details got slighted in the forward motion, this was nonetheless playing of the highest order, with plenty of contrast and an implicit understanding of the idiom. With instrumentalists like these at his command, it is hard to imagine that Masur can go wrong.

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JOHN LOUGHERY

History, Identity, and Other Big Questions

IN *THE CONQUEST OF PARADISE*, one of the more provocative books of 1990, Kirkpatrick Sale wrote about the "discovery" of America and what he called "the Columbian legacy" in starkly revisionist terms. In this account, Columbus is less an embodiment of Renaissance curiosity and nerve than a figure out of "the dark twilight of 15th-century Europe" who promoted that least admirable of Renaissance goals, "the de-godding of Nature" (the phrase is Schiller's). The Great Discoverer as a cultural imperialist, a man of his time rather than a hero for the ages, is not exactly a new idea; the crucial aspect of Sale's book was that its focus went beyond the brutal enslavement of the natives and the mythologizing of gold-lust to the other patterns Columbus' voyages enshrined. The events of the 1490s might also be viewed as advancing the modern mania for deforestation, the indiscriminate triumph of technology over nature, the growing ignorance of ecology and disdain for rational limits on human growth.

Kirkpatrick Sale's well-researched study was naturally on my mind when I saw the National Gallery of Art's celebratory winter blockbuster, "Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration." Similarly, Barbara Tuchman's masterful account of these same years in *The March of Folly*, which I had just finished, was hard to forget: Tuchman describes the late fifteenth century as the nadir of the Christian faith, and 1492 in particular—the year of that gruesome debauchee Alexander VI's ascension to the Papacy—as a year of shame that ultimately led to the Sack of Rome. So the question that nags is: can both views be right? "Circa 1492" was a lavish and expertly arranged show implicitly founded on the premise that the year of Columbus' first voyage was for mankind a highwater mark of creativity and learning. Sale and Tuchman suggest that, if such a dubious notion as an apex of human accomplishment is to be found and proudly noted, it certainly isn't 1492.

Yet there was so much to stare at, linger over, and —yes—feel pride and awe about at this mammoth exhibition. The range and quality of art were extraordinary. The catalogue is the fattest I have ever encountered. It seems to say, "Look on this, ye Cynics, and despair!" Or, as Daniel Boorstin observes in his wise introductory essay, this show could even be seen as "an antidote to science," a hymn—a

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multicultural one, at that—to man the creator rather than political man or man the discoverer, a review of what fifteenth-century geniuses *added* to the world as much as what they learned about how to chart and manipulate it. "The Culture of Discovery," Boorstin writes, was a long-term collaborative effort geared toward the same ends. "The Culture of Creation was a host of countless independents," an expression of individuality that bespeaks "not progress [but] fertile chaos."[1]

The fertile chaos Boorstin extolls was on display in the East Wing in abundant glory. The first section of the show, which (interestingly) would have been the only section in a similar exhibition twenty years ago, was about Europe and "the Mediterranean Basin," its visual culture and rapidly expanding intellectual frontiers. That visual culture in Europe was a strange thing, in some respects. It included the new ideas about linear perspective and measurement, that yielded paintings like the anonymous *Ideal City With a Circular Temple* (1500), as well as the bravura humanist artistry of giants like da Vinci and Dürer (very well represented in the show by many of their best drawings), side-by-side with the tortured fantasies of Hieronymous Bosch. Bosch's apocalyptic *Temptation of St. Anthony* (1500) could be said to have been an ironic portal to the whole experience of "Circa 1492." Brilliant and nightmarish, tied to the past in its religious theme but strikingly modern and eccentric in its style, this picture is both a creative triumph and a statement about something very wrong with Western consciousness—something the Tainos natives in the Caribbean innocently awaiting Columbus' arrival would not have shared or known anything about. Other points of particular interest in the rooms devoted to the Western world in this era included the Bellinis' depictions of scenes in Alexandria and Damascus, da Vinci's 1490 *Portrait of a Young Woman With Ermine* from Cracow (never seen in America before), a number of marvelous West African sculptures and Ottoman kaftans, and some of the earliest maps to incorporate the new geographic information.

The second and third sections, "Toward Cathay" and "The Americas," were the means by which any hint of Eurocentrism in the exhibition—any sense of whitewashing the conquerors' wrongs—was dealt with. For these rooms told us what the history books should have explained all along: that Asia and North and South America were home to societies fully as advanced, organized, worthy, and creative as those of Spain, Portugal, Italy, or France. The essential difference is that most of these cultures could not fathom a level of greed that would involve the risk-taking which the first explorers accepted; furthermore, even those which had the means to undertake similar voyages—China certainly did—had no inclination to do so on that

[1] Jay A. Levenson (ed.), CIRCA 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration, exhibition catalogue, pp. 15–18. National Gallery of Art and Yale University Press. $40.00.

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scale. They are, really, a rebuke to the European state of mind, once upon a time called adventurous, now thought of as grasping. What is more, their art (whether simple or complex) is fully as engaging.

Still, there was much potential for a sort of backfire in this pageant. We proceeded from one vitrine or wall display to another, room after room, spellbound by Japanese scrolls, Korean porcelains, Indian deities, Inkan textiles, Diquís gold, a colossal Aztec rattlesnake head superbly carved out of basalt. Yet if "Circa 1492" exults, on an unsurpassed scale, over how many fine objects were created by talented human beings in that period, I am still not certain why I felt a little uneasy—as well as grateful—about the whole venture later. Perhaps, as some critics have suggested, it just is not possible any more to see aesthetic achievement divorced from its history and social context. And the late 1400s and early 1500s are lodged in my mind with a more mixed impression, or reaction, than this show allowed for—Dürer *and* the Inquisition, Sesshū Tōyō *and* Cortés, mosaic masks *and* Aztec brutality. Maybe the Tupinamba feather cloak (several feet of hundreds of tiny red feathers) said it all: a dazzling object twentieth-century man stares at for its sheer elegance, worn in its time by the fiercest warrior-cannibals of Brazil. Man's creativity is hard to contemplate today *en masse* without reflecting on our foolishness and barbarism; the Age of Exploration led to the triumph of colonialism, rapacious capitalism, the end of some of the very art traditions the Washington exhibition brought before us. Art as a discrete entity circa 1492 proves to be a slippery notion.

The catalogue, referred to earlier, furthers the double-edged idea of a glittering moment in human history, just as it is in itself a kind of monument to scholarly potential and accomplishment. The thirty essays cover every conceivable topic from the "Catalan Atlas," cartography, Portuguese navigation practices, Dürer, Michelangelo (at work at age seventeen in 1492), and Castilian sculpture to the development of the Kangnido (Korea's incredibly detailed world map circa 1402), life in Muromachi Japan, the extermination of the Tainos, and the nature of the Aztec gods. Craig Morris' sensitive evocation of Inkan art and society on the eve of the Spanish invasion and F.W. Mote's comprehensive "China in the Age of Columbus" are alone worth the cost of the volume.

If you were out of the country last spring and summer, or in a coma or on religious retreat, it is possible—though not likely—that you missed the heated controversy over the Smithsonian's other blockbuster of 1991. What a press spectacle! In contrast to the "1492" show, with its somewhat amorphous thesis, "The West as America" exhibition at the National Museum of American Art had a highly specific and patently obvious intention. The show's brave subtitle, "Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier" could not have been clearer—no

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pioneer/cowboy adventure story here—and the result was predictably tempestuous.

The interesting feature of this revisionist study of American art in the light of our genocide against Native Americans and gradual destruction of the environment is not that it riled the good Senator from Alaska and his colleagues into questioning the museum's use of taxpayer monies to present a critical, anti-flagwaving version of our Western heritage. Robert Mapplethorpe or Andres Serrano, the new view of Frederic Remington or George Caleb Bingham—what difference does it make? It is not to be hoped that our leaders in Congress are going to understand the nature of art and art exhibition in these rowdy political times. What was interesting was the complicating factor of the scholarly and intellectual response to curator William Truettner's approach. The *New York Times* art critic Michael Kimmelman, Librarian of Congress-emeritus Daniel Boorstin, historian Simon Schama: the number of writers without any jingoist axe to grind who found cause to complain raised the issue beyond the level of good guys vs. bad guys (revisionists vs. propagandists) and should prompt more thought about standards and intentions in the art and museum world.

We have lived so long now with the false imagery of Manifest Destiny and evil Indians (all those Hollywood movies I grew up on), and we have likewise become so accustomed in recent years to the correctives—the *Dances With Wolves* premise—that there is bound to be, or would seem to be, something inescapably mundane about the whole idea behind this show. Yet I think this assumption is a mistake, part of the whole clever attack on "political correctness." (Even that silly term is in itself an aspect of the conservative effort to avoid discussing certain issues.) This was an exhibition worth doing; its problems were ones of tone and extent, not motivation. Most Americans are woefully ignorant of the unpleasant side of their country's past, still too caught up in notions of a special destiny and sacred purpose, too unaware of the way in which popular imagery shapes our political thinking and self-definition. Should a Smithsonian museum be involved in the business of taking a stand on such murky issues? Damn right it should.

The exhibition, which consisted of a daunting 164 paintings, sculptures, and photographs, was divided into six parts. "Prelude to Expansion" dealt with historical works that aimed to give a spiritual imprimatur, a sense of inevitability, to the migration West. Emmanuel Leutze was a prominent figure—a natural—in this category with histrionic tableaux like *The Departure of Columbus from Palos in 1492* (1855) and *The Founding of Maryland* (1860). The second section showed the conquest of the Promised Land by means of war with Mexico, Conestoga wagons, shoe leather, and rail power. "Inventing 'The Indian' " was a look at the need to transform the Noble Savage myth into the brute opponent of Christian civilization. "Claiming the

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West" brought together images of the ultimate taming of the wild; the fifth section centered on the role of landscape art like Albert Bierstadt's and Thomas Moran's, at the time when tourism first became possible and popular; the final section, "Doing the 'Old America,' " concerned the mythologizing of the West at the hands of men like Frederic Remington and Henry Farny. Each section presented its artworks near extensive wall plaques (summaries of the essays from the 400-page catalogue) that analyzed the underlying racial or political distortions the work is predicated on. Leutze's Maryland picture, for instance, suggests a disingenuous amity between noble, dignified Europeans, here to get the New World on track, and frolicsome, child-like natives. George Caleb Bingham's *Daniel Boone Entering the Cumberland Gap* (1851) or William Jewett's *The Promised Land—The Grayson Family* (1850) intimate a near-mystical or Biblical experience as intrepid white men reach new lands meant for them. This is an art that fed into an ideology, the implications of which are still being played out today. All worthwhile observations. So why the firestorm of criticism from the academics?

There are reasons. I could imagine this show working effectively had it been half its size and a shade (or two) less verbose and didactic. For what the curators have to tell us about the Leutze, Bingham, and Jewett paintings may be true, but by the time we were done examining 164 images—and reading hundreds and hundreds of words on the walls—we were beaten into submission. Surely not the frame of mind in which to leave a museum. Worse, I went home exhausted, cranky, and indifferent to any wrongs committed in the name of American progress. And, most seriously, a few too many artworks were crammed into a designated theoretical slot. ("Gives new meaning to the phrase 'patronizing the arts' " was one visitor's journal entry.) One aches to protest. The Spanish invaders look far more brutal to me than the Aztecs in Leutze's *The Storming of the Teocalli by Cortez and His Troops* (1848), and Charles Bird King's famous, stately portrait of Pawnee warriors may indeed "subsume Indians and their individuality in the artistic tradition and romantic sentiments of the late eighteenth century,"[2] but that "subsuming" was not a slur on anyone in 1822 and the painting remains an honorable one. Still, do lapses of this kind invalidate the theme and usefulness of the whole exhibition? Not at all. The criticism struck me as being, for the most part, grumpy and overstated.

Finally, there is this to be said: no show that takes a healthy swipe at Frederic Remington could be all bad, anyway. The attempt to elevate this mediocre artist and small mind, which the Metropolitan Museum offered us in a large-scale, adulatory retrospective a few years back, was the art-world disgrace of the late eighties. (Did Mr.

[2] William Truettner (ed.), THE WEST AS AMERICA: Reinterpreting Images of the Frontier, exhibition catalogue, p. 152. National Museum of American Art. $60.00.

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Boorstin protest that? I forget.) Never mind the man's notorious racism and anti-Semitism. His propagandizing imagery was banal, his Anglo-Saxon heroes one-dimensional, his sense of composition predictable, and his view of art and life highly limited—and thanks to the National Museum of American Art for saying so and rebuking the Met.

Alexis Smith is a contemporary artist as preoccupied with questions of American identity and culture as that earlier generation of Western mythmakers. Not surprisingly, Smith's angle is critical and ironic, rather than complacent or patriotic. Furthermore, the art she makes has nothing to do with painted images on canvas or other traditional means of expression. She is part of the Conceptualist generation of California artists (Smith was born in Los Angeles in 1949) which is heavily oriented toward modern media and the use of words, whole texts, and appropriated pictures or visual fragments in its own productions. This is a style that has, in my experience of it, yielded a colossal amount of sophomoric, dry, sometimes numbing work. Yet Smith's oeuvre—and a large one it is—seemed in her 1991 retrospective at the Whitney Museum to stand out above that of many of her peers and provided an experience worth pondering and viewing more than once.

"Alexis Smith" was born Patricia Anne Smith. Disliking the blandness of her name, she changed it to Alex Smith in high school in the 1960s and, when she later learned of the existence of the film star, added the last two letters to her first name. This eccentric tidbit says more than it seems to: a child of the postwar culture of Southern California, discontented with the givens of her life (and the givens of an art-school education and aesthetic hierarchies about "proper" media), Smith reinvented herself in the light of popular culture—but, considering the look of her art, with a kind of weird Joseph Cornell twist to the whole business. And, for that matter, this is exactly how she sees America: obsessed with defining itself, ever a challenge for ambitious women, inexorably linked to the icons of mass entertainment, and just a bit surreal, chaotic, quixotic, and anti-rational.

The most dramatic emblem of this way of thinking is the gigantic mixed-media collage painted onto the exhibition's entry wall at the Whitney. *Men Seldom Make Passes At Girls Who Wear Glasses* (1985) is a large rendering of Marilyn Monroe's kerchiefed head with her eyes covered by two sizable panels, taking the place of fifties-style sunglasses. In each glass are the letters of an eye chart superimposed over parts of a photo of a quarterback in action. Marilyn is both gazing, smilingly, at these titans of the modern world and, conversely, aware of being judged and validated by their codes. Like the pieces in the "Jane" series from the same time (Calamity Jane, Jane Doe, Jane Austen, Jane Eyre, Me Tarzan/You Jane), this work is a visually clever embodiment of themes that consumed the art of the last twenty years

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but were seldom raised in American art before that—power, gender, reverence, and insidious control. Smith explores a range of other topics, like the place of the automobile in American life, male aspirations, the grip of nostalgia, technology and travel, but there is often a bite to her pieces that deal with media manipulation of women that make them most assertive and memorable.

But what I like best about Alexis Smith is just that quality that too much contemporary "idea art" lacks—a flair for visual construction, a sense that what we look at should have a mysterious or poetic effect equal to the intellectual concern behind it. These works are, proudly, objects. True, they have precious little meaning without an ability to connect with the concept behind them, but in and of themselves many of them have the same allure that an Arthur Dove assemblage has, or a Max Ernst collage or a Cornell box. *Blue Denim* (1990), an energetic arrangement of trashy fifties movie posters ("Young, Willing, and Eager"), jumper cables, a license plate, and an old pulp-fiction paperback, is straightforward enough in its evocation of auto-eroticism (so to speak), while *Heirloom* (1988) and most of the works from the 1970s are more cryptic, but what they have in common is a deft feel for their materials and a skillful, inventive use of those materials. There is a balance of craft and meaning here that is not to be found in Ashley Bickerton or Annette Lemieux. Alexis Smith is not interested in paint on canvas, but in the bric-a-brac she scavenges for and the moods (often wistful) that she creates, she achieves some potent effects and raises the right question: what does it mean to be an American in the last years of the American Century? Her response is not lockstep left-wing stridency but, instead, a reverie that is gently troubled, nuanced, attentive, and even bemused.

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PATRICK LINDSAY BOWLES

The *Atrides* in Vincennes

THE THÉÂTRE DU SOLEIL, where Ariane Mnouchkine has been directing Euripides' *Iphigénie à Aulis* and the first two parts of the *Oresteia* to dithyrambic praise and full houses for the past year (*Les Euménides* will be added in May) is, not unsymbolically, located in a former ammunition factory, itself located, more symbolically still, in the woods of Vincennes on the outskirts of Paris. Presided over by a stately château, the horsey, aristocratic timelessness of Vincennes has another, more saturnine side, represented by the château's most famous paying (he was chained, actually) guest, the Marquis de Sade, and by the notorious (and since relocated) University of Paris VIII, where Sartre, Lacan, Lyotard and Deleuze contributed to its reputation for hair-raising radicalism, and where I, too, come to think of it, professed on a rather different wavelength for a couple of years (morning lectures in U and Non-U to incredulous latent terrorists, afternoons riding in the surrounding woods with a dimpled Trotskyite who smelled like chestnut trees and earth but no time for her here). With the communists-and-kings associations of Vincennes in mind, you are not altogether surprised, as you enter the grounds of the theatre, by the riding school on your left, where two girls, *blondes cendrées* in Burberrys scarves are galloping (you can see only their heads, and hear only their hooves); by, farther on, two labradors playing on the lawn; that the tall man who takes your ticket is aristocratically named (Baudouin) and dressed (Barbour, flat cap), but also wears, one notes, a beard; to go into the theatre and see a handsome woman in corduroys and Shetland sweater, Oxford graduate, Hellenist and one of Europe's most distinguished directors, behind the buffet counter serving up, with no-nonsense efficiency, orders of *crevettes cyclopéennes* (shrimp and rice) or *délices hyperboréens* (Häagen-Dazs); walk past a Xian-like sunken terra cotta army and take your seat, as I did, next to M. Pierre Juquin, the affable and literate former presidential candidate and would-be reformer of the French Communist Party.

All of which is to say that one best understands what is going on inside Mnouchkine's theatre by understanding something of what's going quietly on all around it. Take, for example, the program notes. Mnouchkine and her Hellenist colleagues make much of the new translations they have provided, claiming to have looked "under" each word of the original Greek and to have discovered finally an "exact meaning," a naive philological faith fueled by their Nietzschean

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(much quoted) nostalgia for the orgiastic religious ecstasies and communal binges of original Dionysian theatre. This may be understood as a quite superfluous reminder of the historical continuity of the twin motivations—alcohol and herd instinct—of most theatregoers. But it may also, and rather more instructively, be looked upon as a religious quest—the twenty-first century will be religious or will not be at all, as Malraux said—kindled by the disappearance of the century's most enthralling eschatological fantasy: communism. Similarly, there is a somewhat worrying paean to Dionysos by André Bonnard also quoted in the notes. "Beyond the islands, beyond the Hellenic sea, the god's joyful procession invades the land of Asia . . . goes forward, like some future Alexander, into the heart of the Eastern world. His march is a conquest and a triumph. Peoples bow down and acclaim him . . . He moves across joyful Arabia, and the burning plains of Persia . . . and on to fabulous India." This may be read as an interesting pedagogical note. But it may also be read as an allegory of the famous French "mission to civilize," and more particularly as a fable of *métissage*, or the blending of cultures, an official policy, universal and epic in inspiration, of the French Ministry of Culture, by whom Mnouchkine is subsidized. The Minister of Culture himself, M. Jack Lang, who ten years ago vociferously denounced American cultural imperialism, but who more recently was on the cover of a magazine wearing a satin bad boy jacket and holding a ghetto blaster, without perhaps, fully understanding why, is himself something of a weathervane. For Ariane Mnouchkine, whose internationalism—costumes, choreography and cast—also stems, at least indirectly, from the Internationale, has now produced, without, perhaps, fully understanding why, something that is quite frankly *arrière garde*.

Mnouchkine's allusions are by and large gratuitous. The superb make-up and costumes, for example, with references to Assyro-Babylonian, Greek, Indian, and Chinese cultures, as well as, I believe, an allusion to Yves St. Laurent's 1986 Russian line, are truly jaw-dropping. But then so, presumably, were those of the Texas troupe who toured England a few decades ago dressed and talking like cowboys in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. They hardly help us to connect with the text. One, in fact, distracts from the other. The dances, combining the most graceful or expressive elements from Greek folk, Kathakali, Kabuki and flamenco, as well as some unidentifiable ferret-down-the-trousers movements, are like the spellbinding illuminations in the margins of an illiterate's Bible. They may have once worked their magic on stupefied peasants in their native lands, but strike us here as no more significant than synchronized swimming.

The problem with the cast—a Lebanese Agamemnon, Brazilian Clytemnestra and Indian Iphigeneia—is not their cosmopolitanism (how could that be a problem?), but that they seem more suited to comedy. Simon Abkarian's dreadlocks, cephalophoric ruff of beard

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and twitching nose made me think that I had indeed gazed upon the face of Agamemnon, but also upon that of Roddy McDowell in *Planet of the Apes*. A middling Agamemnon—he has the young actor's way of sounding "old": syllable-chopping glottal stops that make a lazy pocketa-pocketa sound which lulls one rapidly into inattention—he shines, however, as a scarlet-clad, put-on Achilles in the *Iphigénie* (he looks like a thermos with lips). Clytemnestra (Juliana Carneiro da Cunha) is not a native speaker of French and over-compensates with perfect, grimacing enunciation. Tragi-comically miscast as an aristocrat, she made me think of Marthe Vilalonga, the French comic Jewish, and more specifically *pied noir*, mother. With Nirupama Nityanandan (Iphigeneia) she provided the low point of the entire nine hours I saw when they exchanged humorless catatonic grins for several unbelievable seconds so that Iphigeneia's death would be all the more touching when it came. One thought of some unctuous, furry Spielberg foetus and its Child, or, no, that's it: the Houston hit mom and her girl.

These are preeminently plays that require the kind of spooky, celestial *sotto in sù* of Taormina, Epidaurus or even Avignon. Which brings us to a problem far more important than the minor shortcomings of actors and directors. Is Greek tragedy, even in the best of circumstances, revivable? Probably—although it continues to haunt us (playing simultaneously as I saw *Les Atrides* in Paris were Racine's *Iphigénie* at the Comédie Française with a Greek director, a *Phèdre* by the Japanese Junji Fuseya, Sartre's politicized adaptation of *Les Troyennes*, and Apollinaire's Tiresias bounding around sets by David Hockney at the Châtelet)—not.

At least not by means of mere philological scrupulousness, which only serves to make it more foreign to us still. Greek tragedies have, for example, no plots, strictly speaking, but are rather stylized debates. As such, they are above all exquisitely refined divertissements for trope-hunting connoisseurs. Am I going too far out on a limb however in assuming that most theatre-goers wouldn't recognize a bdelygma if they rode to work in a car pool with one? The new translations have not really added dramatic tension—I mean tendentiousness—to the debates. Although Clytemnestra is given a slight rhetorical advantage (nothing new) against the decent civic morality-mongering of the chorus, the dialogues remain too fair-minded, even ho-hum, to inspire us with anything like the *saeva indignatio* they should. All that these goat-songs kindle is sheepish acquiescence. "*Action mauvaise*," says the Coryphaeus as she stands over two bloodied wax cadavers. And you think, well, yes. The lesson we come away with from these tragedies is that "*Le divin*," which is to say the omnipotent, inexorable black hole of destiny of which these plays are the shattered specula, "*triomphera toujours*," an immobilizing message if ever there was one: you can do nothing against fate. It is wholly congruent with that of another famous Mnouchkine hero, Molière, whose most

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famous, and wildly misinterpreted, play *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, has an equally un-Marxist (and un-American) moral: stay in your place.

Above all, we inevitably miss the meta-point that these plays make. Our reactions to what is most accessible in Greek tragedy—the "plots" or story-lines—are crazily, and necessarily, skewed. There's a *humour noir*, and-then-there-were-none side to the tetralogy: demented aristocratic father kills daughter, his wife kills him, his son kills her and (I hope I'm not giving anything away) so on into the sunset, pursued by the Furies. Moreover, it is not the slaying of sweet little Iphigeneia by her apparently criminally superstitious father Agamemnon, acting on the—to modern ears, extravagant—assumption that killing her will provide his ships with favorable winds to sail to Troy, but the fact that it *works*—as soon as she's killed, perfect sailing weather—that inspires us not with fear, not with pity, but with a kind of black, hellish hilarity.

One of the reasons why Greek tragedies can't live on their own today is the reason why they continue to live at all: they are far more efficiently hypostasized as something other than themselves: as proto-Freudian metaphors, or as the substructures of modern theatre, and perhaps nowhere more powerfully than in the unOlympian realms of things like *Dynasty* or *Dallas* (their protagonists, too, addled and hounded by Aphrodite, Dionysos and, moreover, Ganymede). That is why even highbrow spectators are likely to experience more "fear and pity" through these lowbrow entertainments than through any Greek revival, however faithful to the text, or however avant-garde. It is less absurdly *terre à terre* than one might think to speak of the Euripides-Aeschylus tetralogy as a 12-hour mini-series about the marital, military and above all religious problems of the (proto-Colby, proto-Ewing) Atreus family (in French, *Les Atrides*).

There is something unMediterranean about Mnouchkine's earnestness in trying to breathe life into a mythological cemetery, into texts that were already as dead as doornails when Aristophanes parodied them and Juvenal, expressing the attitude of his cultivated Roman contemporaries, stood the whole ships-and-sacrifices thing on its head ("Must I stick to the usual round / Of Hercules' labours, what Diomede / did, the bellowing of that thingummy in the Labyrinth?"). And it is the French who, from Offenbach to Laforgue to Giraudoux have more than anyone else kept the Greeks alive, not through reverential restoration, or by making them universal, but by Parisianizing them, through derision, ridicule and vulgarity. Offenbach's divinely silly *La Belle Hélène* was accused of blaspheming Antiquity, quite the best way, when you think about it, to keep Antiquity alive. Blasphemy is indeed one of the four things (the others are nudity, violence and a blatant political message) missing from this production which, for all the jungle rhythms accompanying it, remains rather lifeless. If it illustrates a tragic inability to be pagan, i.e., god-filled as the program notes say, it is, finally, moving in its attempt to fill a vacancy by resurrecting gods who, if we cannot bow down to them,

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can at least be recognized as familiar ancestors of something we have, long since, gone far, far beyond.

After six hours of just about anything, one dreams of revenge. After nine hours, however, I found myself succumbing to a kind of Stockholm syndrome. As *Les Choéphores* came to an end, a man—an American, as it so happened—leapt to his feet and shouted "Bravo!" Sit down, you fool, I felt like saying. "Sit down, you fool," I said, but the loud applause, including my own, drowned out the words.

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TOM WILHELMUS

Novelty

I HAVE BEEN THINKING ABOUT WHY I chose the following books to write about, and I have concluded that it is their novelty. In one version of this essay I even included a long reflection on the topic which I have now edited out. Finally, it looks like I just could not tolerate picking another John Hawkes look-alike (why not the real thing?), another Australian soap opera, another novel about an Irishman with a drinking problem, another earnest collection of pro-feminist short stories, or another work by Joyce Carol Oates. The works I have chosen may not be the greatest, though most of them are pretty fine, but at least they seemed fresh. Freshness, novelty is always worth remarking if only because it is so hard to define and so difficult to come by.

Sometimes novelty even means a return to styles and subjects that we had thought were passé (it is true, though I will spare you John Barth's ideas on the subject of literary exhaustibility). Nina Berberova's new collection, *The Tattered Cloak and Other Novels*,[1] contains six compositions (I will call them stories) which first appeared in Europe in the thirties, forties, and fifties and which seem fresh although their manner most certainly is not. That is merely to say that Berberova is no Nabokov although the two of them were nearly the same age (he was born in 1899, she in 1901), born in Russia, left under similar circumstances, lived in Europe, and eventually emigrated to the United States. He, however, was a high modernist in technique and sensibility; she derives from the age of Chekov and Tolstoy.

Even if Berberova's style seems dated, there is something poignant about her storytelling, especially as it pertains to the theme of exile. She was still in her teens when her family fled Russia and wound up in Paris (her father was a czarist-era bureaucrat), and all of her stories organize themselves around a single emotional center—the lost glory of innocence and youth and the sense of cruelty and betrayal in adult life. In the title story, for instance, a young woman finds that the Paris to which she has traveled resembles "neither silk nor lace nor champagne" and that living there is more like "looking at the stucco wall of [one's] neighbor's house, it's raining, and the courtyard stinks." Progressively as her life unfolds, the bleakness continues. For years

[1] THE TATTERED CLOAK AND OTHER NOVELS, by *Nina Berberova*. Trans. by *Marian Schwartz*. Alfred A. Knopf. $21.00.

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she is forced to work in a laundry to earn a living and to support her father. Even when the Nazis arrive in 1940 her life does not change—one set of soiled linens replaces another in a life of dull routine. And when a figure does show up from her past and she remembers what her life might have been and has a vision of "orange trees . . . blooming in gardens," it is only the prelude to a sad recognition. "What kind of grandeur," she asks, "could visit a life of such poverty and vulgarity" as her own?

Similarly, "The Resurrection of Mozart" begins on the eve of the evacuation of Paris in June 1940, among a group of well-to-do exiles—including a sensitive young woman—who play a parlor game about "the dead, and what they would say if they were resurrected and saw what was going on today." She chooses Mozart as the person she would resurrect, and mysteriously in the course of the story a young refugee, a musician, does take up residence in their summer house. We expect him to tell us how he feels, of course, but he says nothing and silently moves on. Also, in "The Waiter and the Slut," another woman exile has sold herself and her youth, "for romance," but slowly degenerates until she is no longer fit for anyone better than a former officer, now a waiter, himself a dreamer whose life is ending in despair.

To her credit, Berberova avoids making these themes as trite or sentimental as they sound. "Astashev in Paris" shrewdly shows how members of the emigrant community could often victimize each other as they search out their own sad idea of happiness in a foreign land. In this case, a small-time insurance salesman, pursuing his own interests, makes his living by selling "life" where it hardly even exists. Moreover, he symbolizes what, all over Europe, the bourgeoisie are eagerly becoming:

> [Astashev] read the paper every day, and always with the same [indifference]. . . . [When, however,] he came upon photographs in which one man wearing a first-rate pair of army boots greeted thousands wearing the same boots, something inside him shivered secretly and happily. . . . He dreamed of order—of a man who could hold in his hands all of Europe, and thus the whole world as well. And then he, Astashev, would get himself a pair of those smart boots, which would stand as a mark of distinction for people adhering to a great discipline.

The point is deftly made: the fascist dream of world domination is reduced to a desire for a smart pair of boots!

But even the futuristic final story, "In Memory of Schliemann," reverts to the same, haunted exile's refrain. How can any future not seem empty and cruel compared to what we had in St. Petersburg and is now gone? Because of its science fiction qualities the story at first seems out of place, until we realize that even its science fiction

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resembles Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* or Zamyatin's *We*. And if at times in a similar fashion the whole volume seems nostalgic, in its testimony to the life of an emigrant Russian exile it also seems new.

I had to stop and think about why Reynolds Price's new collection of three long stories, *The Foreseeable Future*,[2] seems similarly attractive. Part of the reason I suspect is the improvement over last year's *The Tongues of Angels*, which struck me as a novel about an experience that was talked about but not revealed. In contrast, *The Foreseeable Future* presents convincing characters with complex lives who carry the burden of their history, both personal and collective, in a way that is utterly sincere.

The themes, of course, are typically Southern—themes of race, class, history, lineage, war, patriotism, and guilt—but Price also addresses them in a novel fashion, a fashion which derives from the fact that (unlike Faulkner) he is a believer and that (unlike O'Connor) he is unable and unwilling to treat his characters like grotesques. And however readers choose to react to those conditions, it places the emphasis on the spot where Price must feel it belongs—on the lives of ordinary people whom he respects, people who may make mistakes and are sinful but who are capable of goodness though it is not something they can expect to achieve strictly on their own.

History in this conception may sometimes prove providential, for in the first story, "The Fare to the Moon," when Kayes Pashal is called away to the war in 1941, he is separated from the black mistress with whom he has lived for the previous six months. The affair has ruined his relationship with his wife and son; and therefore, while he acknowledges that his lover has been "a kind intelligent person who fit against his mind and body, and *chose* to fit, in every way a sane human being would pray to find this side of death," nonetheless, the disruption will allow Kayes to attempt to redeem himself in his family's eyes. His time away will enable him to "clear . . . his mind" and wait "in patience, for the grace to recognize and make all due amends." And if the result seems cruel to Leah, the mistress, she at least is strong, and Kayes's decision is an appropriate act of duty and selflessness.

In "The Foreseeable Future," the title story, the protagonist's return from the war and from a nearly fatal wound allows him to review his life and to find a reason for coming to terms with his less-than-perfect past and for living in the here and now. Despondent and potentially suicidal, Whitley Wade spends a week on the road as a claims adjuster reacquainting himself with the human race. Members of the latter include a roadside healer named Mother Juanita, a neglected uncle, a former black mistress by whom he has had a child, a young boy who assists him after a roadside accident, a woman (a

[2] THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, by *Reynolds Price*. Atheneum. $21.95.

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childhood admirer) to whom he is drawn but with whom he resists having a one-night stand, a fellow veteran more disabled than he is, and an old man who has endured since the Civil War. Each of these people provides a moral example or a moral contrast for Whit, whose own clarity of purpose seems to grow as the week progresses. Most of these folks are "right kind," and in the end he is persuaded to pursue his life within the comfort and support of his family. Similarly, in the final story a coach's close encounter with the death of a former player causes him to see his own rage (he is a Vietnam veteran) and to avoid the impending breakup of his marriage.

To be sure, not every Southern life achieves the kind of poise and contentment available to each of Price's principal characters in these stories. Blacks in particular (usually women, usually victimized sexually by white men) appear to have little hope and seem unnaturally forgiving and accommodating as a result. In this sense the stories seem more homiletic than real—more valuable for their assurances that traditional virtues like love, restraint, sacrifice, care for the nurturing of children, family, and a concern for other human beings are not impossible attainments, though difficult, for ordinary people of the region Price knows and loves.

A more dark and complicated, but refreshingly thoughtful novel about the process by which history and literature often seduce us in potentially harmful ways is the Austrian Christoph Ransmayr's *The Terrors of Ice and Darkness*.[3] This was Ransmayr's first novel (although in this country its publication follows that of *The Last World* which appeared here in 1990), and its claims to our attention are scholarly and intellectual as well as dramatic, though not in a cumbersome and uninteresting way. At one level, the novel comes across as pure adventure: the retelling of the story of the 1873-75 Imperial Austro-Hungarian Polar Expedition complete with photographs, sketches, lists, charts, chronicles, diaries, and journals (annoyingly, the volume does *not* include a map). At another, however, it challenges us to think about why we find such adventures appealing, especially when we discover their cost both in life and limb and when we measure the motives for which we pursue some of our loftiest personal and public goals.

The novel begins with the efforts of the narrator to explain the death of a young twentieth-century Italian, Josef Mazzini, who wandered off and died in the icy wastes of the far north in 1981. He had first met Mazzini in a bookseller's amid "much discussion of manuscripts and rare editions and much drinking of cheap wine" and had listened while the Italian developed his unusual theory that he could "think up stories, invent a plot or a course of events, write them down, and then check whether there had ever been *real* precursors of

[3] THE TERRORS OF ICE AND DARKNESS, by *Christoph Ransmayr*. Trans. by *John E. Woods*. Grove Weidenfeld. $19.95.

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his imaginary figures in the distant or recent past." This madness had apparently led Mazzini—a student of the expedition—to his death.

Mad as the theory initially sounds, however, the narrator challenges us to see the number of features it has in common with what actually happens when we are drawn into books where the *genre* itself dictates what we expect will occur. The point is, we like tales of adventure precisely because they contain the narrow escapes, intolerable suffering, righteous rebellion, and eventual madness we have come to expect. Great pleasure attends all that we learn about the months of uninterrupted darkness, about the temperature at which life can no longer be sustained, about disappearing foodstuffs and discipline, and how boredom is controlled and madness contained. In addition to the facts, the motives are equally important. We like to read about how the adventurers themselves in most cases are highly-educated, patriotic and heroic, highly *literate* men who, nonetheless, are engaged in a terrible pursuit for personal glory at the cost of human lives. What pride, what vanity, but also what glory, we feel, must have attended the winning of each new prospect, each new landfall, each new latitude north, encountered by such men?

Ransmayr takes a page from Conrad in suggesting that the origin of such vanity lies in part with the books the adventurers had read and longed to write. Just as Conrad's Marlow had pointed to the blank spaces on the map and longed to go there, Ransmayr points out that the great (and mad) adventurers:

> were not content simply to go adventuring. [They] also made [their] adventures public, at the very least in postcards and letters. But above all in reports and accounts, profusely illustrated and secretly fostering an illusion: that even the most remote and distant spot is as accessible as an amusement park, a twinkling Coney Island. . . .

In other words, like Emma Bovary or Don Quixote, they were victims of a script, a culturally imposed imperative, contained in books that they themselves had read. Mazzini, too, is a victim (what John Barth once called "a poor, print-oriented bastard") of following such a text albeit at one more remove—a novel conception in an adventure story convincingly told.

Novelty also may proceed by a method, subject, or manner that is so restricted, so specialized that you wonder how the writer can get away with it. This is the feeling I have with two new books, *Brief Lives*[4] by Anita Brookner and *A Glimpse of Scarlet*[5] by Roxana Robinson, which

[4] BRIEF LIVES, by *Anita Brookner*. Random House. $20.00.

[5] A GLIMPSE OF SCARLET AND OTHER STORIES, by *Roxana Robinson*. HarperCollins. $18.95.

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will test the patience of some readers though the satisfactions of perseverance may be great.

In the first instance, Brookner's novel is so English, so reserved and unemotional, that it is at first difficult to care whether it goes on at all. To be sure, we are supposed to like her for the same reasons we like Jane Austen: because she is restrained, subtle, analytical, rational, psychologically and socially acute. "Meticulous" is a word often used to describe her style. In this case, however, it is hard to imagine that she has not carried such qualities to a new extreme. The style seems almost a parody of itself, less an attempt to restrain emotion for the sake of reason than to wither it entirely and lay it to rest.

Brief Lives describes the lives and progressive isolation and decline of two women, one a former radio singer, the other a former cabaret star, who for all the glamour of their former professions wind up sharing a polite, flat, encapsulated, timorous, and uninteresting middle-class existence waiting merely for death.

At least that is the tone Fay, the former radio singer who narrates the novel, uses to hide everything—including some very scandalous activity—beneath a thick layer of matronly decorum. Preoccupied with appearances, with clothing, decorating, meals, with politeness to even the most impolite people, and with taking care of in-laws, she almost forgets that she once had a career, that her husband never much seemed interested in her and died after being accused of some shady business dealings, that she also once had a lover, or that she fears isolation and emerging old age. Her nemesis, Julia, at least has more spunk—never mind that she has become a marchioness of the clothes closet and habitué of the warm, relaxing tub. Fay, whose upper lip is stiff, certainly is capable of making difficult decisions for the sake of propriety and the good of everyone concerned. But mostly this means having less and less to do with more and more of the people she has known whose friendship, despite the bother, might have offered her some comfort. By the time all the men in their lives have died off, when Julia's progressively debilitating arthritis threatens to incapacitate her entirely, Fay even manages to send her off—thereby depriving herself of any friendship whatsoever.

That is what is so fascinating: somehow *Brief Lives* manages to take the poignancy captured in some of the old songs ("Only Make Believe," "I'll Be Loving You, Always") which Fay sang during her radio career in the forties and use it to turn a portrait of decrepitude and old age into farce.

A Glimpse of Scarlet makes something of an opposite tendency to describe people we do not especially like in a manner that reveals inner depths we did not think they had—as in the title story where a glimpse of color through a half-open door tells the narrator that two people must be having an affair and makes their world seem brave and desperate, almost admirable: "All that risk, the guilt, the danger,

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balanced against something so rich, so sumptuous, so imperative that he had no choice but to risk it all."

Perhaps this quality of risky insight originates in the habit of story-telling characteristic of New York City, of Henry James and John Cheever with a little Louis Auchincloss on the side. Once again these are the rich who are, we are told, very different, who summer in Southampton, entrain for Switzerland for skiing after their annual business trip to Paris, whose children attend Choate after looking at Brooks, Middlesex, Westminster, and St. George's, and who when taken seriously seem rather boring if the truth be known. Despite their riches, they lead lives complicated only by a trite round of idleness and divorce, the complex arrangements of dealing with parents who have remarried, children who are not one's own, parties or graduations made difficult by who is in attendance with whom, and affairs both suspected and known.

All the same, with a phrase or two Robinson can turn a trip up to St. George's into a drive to remember—"red-brick Georgian with white trim, set with big old sugar maples . . . a clear day, early summer, with no wind . . . shadows stretching across the sloping lawns, turning the landscape majestic." Also, pain is pain, whether it is that of a stepmother trying desperately to gain the love of her stepson (in "Layering") or that of an old woman who wants simply to live among "big bowls of roses, big floating pools of scent throughout the house" (in "Getting On"). Measured against the real troubles of the world, Robinson's stories may seem altogether too precious, too refined. Within their own time and place, however, their artistry seems complete, deftly realized and humane.

Finally, in the aptly named collection of stories, *The Voice of America*,[6] Rick DeMarinis manages to capture some of the range and complexity of the American experience, particularly west of the Mississippi, in a yawpish whoop of Whitmanesque barbarism that should leave all Americans gasping with mistrust of themselves but also fascinated by their incredible energy. This is a collection which strains for novelty and pretty much succeeds.

The situation described in "Paradiso: an Elegy" can stand as a metaphor for the collection as a whole. It is a story about a man dying of cancer whose friends take him on a last wild ride through the Southwest. But as the narrator explains in words that go well beyond the immediate situation:

> We are western by chance, and remain so by choice. We love cars and rock and roll more than we love fine art and baroque music. We wear this preference on our pearl-buttoned sleeves. We've been antsy from birth: the verb "to go" was the first we learned to

[6] THE VOICE OF AMERICA, by *Rick DeMarinis*. W. W. Norton. $18.95.

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> conjugate. We've got Cowboy Junkies in the tape deck and a six-pack of Lone Star balanced on the console between the seats.

So, whether the protagonist is an eleven-year-old kid disappointed that World War II is over because he cannot join up yet and leave his trashy mother, or a young airman fresh out of bootcamp whose first sexual sweetheart leaves him for a greaser in a hot rod, or a man who repossesses cars and appliances whose moral code derives from "Star Trek" and Captain Kirk, or a rapist and potential serial killer who manages a trailer park, or a college student who hitches a ride with a religious freak and his nine-month pregnant wife (impregnated while they made love in a missile silo "leaning out close to the Minuteman" somewhere under North Dakota), or a man who writes romances under the *nom de plume* Veronica LaMonica—the message is largely the same:

> Live as happily as you can, take care of your loved ones, stay as sane as conveniently possible, and don't try to sink the *Pequod* or any other literary vessel you think is sailing off with cargoes of High Significance that would be more ably delivered by you. The white whale lives. The white whale owns us. All *Pequods* sink. Oh yes, we are as insignificant, dense, small-minded, petty, hopeless, and unredeemable as we appear to be. We are blind pupfish in a mighty ocean. This is, of course, not exactly a prime-time bulletin.

DeMarinis' stories have the high energy and low self-esteem that Americans sometimes crave. They provide a fresh insight into an old problem, one that seems utterly novel.

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GARY KRIST

Other Voices, Other Rooms

THERE ONCE WAS A TIME when being anything but a white heterosexual was a crippling obstacle for an author trying to make an impression in the literary marketplace. Not so long ago, books by Hispanic-, African-, and Asian-Americans were often the publishers' equivalent of box office poison. Gay and lesbian writers, when they could find any outlet at all for their work, were relegated to tiny specialized presses. Even being female tended to have its disadvantages, including being marginalized into categories of letters like "Women's Magazine Fiction" or "Feminist Literature."

But that was before the rise of such writers as Alice Walker, Amy Tan, Oscar Hijuelos, David Leavitt, Louise Erdrich, Toni Morrison. That was before major awards started going regularly to writers who were not white and male. While I don't want to minimalize the difficulties still faced by many such writers in getting their work published and recognized, it seems clear to me that the mainstream of American publishing is becoming increasingly open to the works of previously unheard or underheard voices. As evidence, one need only look at 1990's list of finalists for the National Book Award for fiction. It included novels by a black male (Charles Johnson, who went on to win the award), a Philippine-American woman, two writers (one male, one female) of Hispanic descent, and Joyce Carol Oates. That was the same year that *The Mambo Kings Play Songs of Love* won the Pulitzer, the same year that *The Joy Luck Club* dominated bestseller lists for months on end.

There is, of course, a price to be paid by some of these authors for their increased acceptance; one of my more militant Chinese-American friends, for instance, accuses Amy Tan of being a sellout, of whitewashing the Chinese-American experience so that it will be more palatable and recognizable to a mainstream Caucasian audience. But books like Tan's (along with movies like Spike Lee's) do add to the richness and range of what we choose to call the contemporary American experience. And whether this greater inclusiveness is regarded as a triumph of, or a betrayal of, that much battered concept, multiculturalism, the fact remains that the books are there—and they are being noticed, even when they are not entirely true to the cultures they claim to depict.

As a product of white suburbia, I cannot say for sure whether the black ghetto culture of Connie Porter's lovely first novel, *All-Bright*

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Court,[1] is accurately rendered or not. But I can say that I finished the book hoping that it was, hoping that the people she writes about were truly capable of wrenching as much dignity from their lives as Porter allows them to. Her book, really a collection of vignettes rather than a novel, takes as its setting a housing project in an upstate New York steel town during the early 1960s. Some of the people living in All-Bright Court (a name somewhat too heavy with irony for my taste) are Hispanic and Polish-American, but most of them are Southern blacks who have moved to the industrial North in search of better economic opportunities. And while they never achieve the escape from poverty they have come north to find, they do manage to make a life for themselves, and a context in which at least a few of their children can take the next step up the socioeconomic ladder.

Although the narrative focuses on two individual families, Porter's imaginative sympathies encompass an entire subculture, rich in its curious mixture of Southern rural lore and urban ghetto realism. Her characters are people in radical transition, standing at the intersection of hoodoo and union-busting, of back-country dirt-eating and inner-city drug abuse. Porter's insight into the psychology of these people does not seem particularly deep—she has a tendency to fall back on clichés about shattered dreams and the like—but she has the compassion necessary to make her characters convincing. She writes simply but powerfully, and with a command of detail that lends authority to the world she depicts:

> Before the steel could be poured into molds, the first helper had to test it. To do this he put on a silver-colored, zinc-rayonized suit . . . and went out onto a catwalk over the ladle of molten steel where he took a sample. If he were to fall in, as sometimes men did, he had an assurance from Capital that the steel would not be used. A body in the steel spoiled the whole batch, the men were told.

Those last two sentences elegantly crystallize the dubious situation of black workers in the early years of the civil rights movement, when white society's assurances of dignity and fair play often seemed to have force only as long as they coincided with more urgent economic considerations. This is the deftest kind of sociological commentary, and Connie Porter proves herself adept at it throughout this slim novel. The fact that a book so quiet and unglamorous can be a selection of the Book of the Month Club says encouraging things to me about the alleged decline of American publishing.

One person who can claim at least some credit for the greater visibility of works like *All-Bright Court* is Paule Marshall, whose 1959 novel *Brown Girl, Brownstones*—about the daughter of Barbadian

[1] ALL-BRIGHT COURT, by *Connie Porter*. Houghton Mifflin. $19.95.

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immigrants living in Brooklyn—was something of a milestone in the literature of African-American women. In that book, Marshall, like Porter, addressed the aspirations of an entire population on the move, both geographically and economically. Now, in *Daughters*,[2] she has actually broadened that already broad scope, encompassing the experience of the whole black diaspora in the Americas. The resulting book, as might be expected, is enormously ambitious. What might not be expected is how well the book succeeds in realizing its ambitions.

The protagonist of *Daughters* is Caribbean-born, American-educated Ursa Beatrice Mackenzie, the daughter of a popular island politician and his American wife. Ursa now lives in New York, where she is trying to eke out an independent existence by conducting social research projects about urban black life in the Northeast. A woman prone to excessive brooding, she finds herself in a position common to many middle-class blacks, never having known the poverty and hopelessness that define life for too many of her fellow blacks, but not entirely sure how to use her greater blessings to "be useful" to them. Ursa yearns, moreover, for a lost sense of cooperation between black men and women, symbolized for her by a monument she remembers from her childhood—a statue comprised of men and women, old and young, black and Hispanic, fighting together for the freedom of her native island of Triunion.

In one sense, the narrative of *Daughters* can be seen as the gradual spoiling of that sentimentalized image in Ursa's mind. She is repeatedly confronted with situations—both on Triunion and in the US—that reveal the futility of any attempt to recapture that cooperative spirit (if it ever really existed). The "collar-and-tie black folks," most of them males, consistently end up betraying their own people to the interests of Big Money, either through greed, self-obsession, or a misguided sense of how change is accomplished. The attempts of their women—mothers, wives, daughters—to act as their consciences prove ultimately ineffective. The result is the frustrating lack of improvement in living conditions that Ursa finds among American *and* Caribbean blacks.

By the end of this absorbing novel, Marshall appears to be advocating a change in the role African-American women must play in the effort to end this stalemate. The change, echoed thematically by the abortions that recur throughout the novel, is not a particularly pretty one. Marshall apparently feels that the work of the corrupted—of the people who have made it and have turned their backs on those who haven't—must be undermined and cut away. This may involve giving up the ideal of a united male and female effort, but Marshall appears to believe that something drastic is necessary for any realistic progress to occur.

[2] DAUGHTERS, by *Paule Marshall*. Atheneum. $19.95.

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Not the least of the author's accomplishments in this expertly crafted novel is her success in making all of this prescriptive sociology sound not the least bit sermonish. While her characters do tend to represent segments of a population, they are also fully-developed human beings, with all of the warmth, vibrancy, and contradictory energy so often lacking in characters who carry a lot of emblematic freight. The book is bound to make many people angry (black males in particular), but Marshall's voice has an eloquence and authority that demands to be taken seriously.

While on the subject of making males angry, I should make mention of an anthology I came across in my readings this quarter. Topical anthologies, of course, have long been a haven for underheard voices, lending out-of-the-mainstream authors a collective clout that they might not be able to command when published individually. A trip to the fiction shelves of any decent bookstore will turn up a number of such narrowly focused story collections—stories by West Coast gay and lesbian writers, by Canadians living outside of Canada, by Chinese women. The one I picked up was somewhat wider in the range of authors chosen, but quite narrow in subject matter: *Revenge: Short Stories by Women Writers*.[3] Here, under one roof, are stories by Louisa May Alcott, Elizabeth Gaskell, Muriel Spark, Alice Walker, and a host of young British women, all on the topic of serving just deserts, more often than not to men who have done their women wrong.

Actually, this book could have been a lot of fun if the material had been better chosen. But too many of these stories, perhaps because of the subject matter, perhaps because of a certain critical hamfistedness in editor Kate Saunders, are simply not very good, flawed by excesses of melodrama, piousness, or, in more than one case, an overly cute narrative neatness (boy gets girl, boy loses girl, girl gets boy back in spades). A couple of the stories—by Lisa St. Aubin de Terain and Joanna Briscoe—seem barely publishable; their inclusion here only sharpens my longing for authors who might have been tapped, like Faye Weldon, Jeanette Winterson, or Ivy Compton-Burnett, all of whom would seem to be naturals at this particular brand of poison. No, writing well may be the best revenge, but revenge is apparently not the best way of writing well, at least if this collection is representative. Despite a few pleasant surprises (like the wonderfully acidic stories by Winifred Holtby and Candia McWilliam), this theme anthology is not one of the better examples of the genre.

It should surprise no one that revenge, or at least getting the last laugh, is a tempting subject for writers who regard themselves as disenfranchised. I'm not sure, however, that it always makes for good, complex fiction (just as revenge itself, no matter how satisfying, is rarely an intellectually subtle response to injustice). Witness *The*

[3] REVENGE: Stories by Women Writers, ed. by *Kate Saunders*. Faber and Faber. $19.95.

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Cutter,[4] a second novel by Cuban-born author Virgil Suarez. The novel tells the story of Julian Campos, a young man trying to escape Castro's Cuba of the late sixties. Julian has been stranded by his parents (they tried to bring him out of the country with them but were stopped at the airport) and has since been shunted around the country in "voluntary" service to the state as a cane-cutter, bottle-factory worker, and night watchman. Julian's hatred for the communist regime, like that of many members of Cuba's dispossessed merchant class, is intense; he spends most of his time dreaming (those dream clichés again!) of escape, of reaching Miami and starting a new life in America. The book chronicles his increasing humiliation at the hands of the petty tyrants of the Castro regime—humiliations that ultimately make him desperate enough to try to get out of the country illegally.

Here again, the evocation of time and place is strong. Suarez skillfully conjures the nightmare of life under an overly vigilant regime:

> Blackout. Julian stares at the ceiling while the noise of a patrol helicopter drums into the room. Its vibrations shake the picture frames against the walls. Boom gone, the sound settles into an echo, a fading noise that reminds him of a flock of cowbirds fluttering up from a cane field, then turns into an overwhelming silence that creeps gently in the dark. Through the cone-shaped mosquito net, the darkness works strange configurations. Who are they after?

For all of the evocative writing, however, one can't help wondering how tainted by politics these descriptions are. Castro's Cuba, as seen through Julian's jaundiced eye, is an unrelentingly bleak place, where the rain never seems to stop, where personal fulfillment is all but impossible, and where the only people of virtue are enemies of the state. But the tenor of the book changes, radically and suddenly, once Julian makes his escape. The Venezuelan fishermen on his rescue boat, for instance, engage in a cheerful fish fight—the first real communal joy depicted in the book—almost instantly upon reaching Key West. Miami, meanwhile, turns out to be chock-full of people who want to help him (so there, Señor Castro!). And even the sun starts shining again, the rain having stopped once Julian left Cuban waters.

It is instructive to compare this kind of facile delineation of good and evil with the work of a truly sophisticated moralist like Nadine Gordimer. I should mention that the news of Gordimer's Nobel hit the streets just as I was choosing books for this chronicle. I hadn't

[4] THE CUTTER, by *Virgil Suarez*. Available Press. $7.95p.

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planned to review her latest effort, *Jump and Other Stories*[5] (as a white South African, she didn't seem to fit my subject), but I decided to have a look at it anyway. The book turned out to be extraordinary, and certainly not irrelevant to the discussion here.

Though the collection is remarkably consistent in quality, it contains a handful of particularly valuable stories—stories that deserve long lives in those theme anthologies I mentioned earlier. "Home," for instance, outlines the incremental radicalizing of a well-off, apolitical woman of mixed race, whose mother and siblings have been jailed by the police. In "Keeping Fit," another superb story, a comfortable white man stumbles upon one of those brutal black-on-black killings he's only read about in the newspaper; retreating to a nearby shantytown, he finds himself in a situation that proves resistant to his usual defense of easy, sentimental commiseration (often expressed by a handout of money) followed by forgetful inaction.

But perhaps the best story in the collection is "Safe Houses," in which a white political fugitive and a much sheltered upper-middle-class woman meet on a bus and enter into a short affair. The fugitive, seeking the safety of anonymity (and a safe house to elude the authorities) doesn't reveal his identity to the woman, who is seeking a kind of safety herself behind the fences and high trees that isolate her home from the unpleasantnesses beyond. Together, they share an interlude of grace—rendered with Gordimer's characteristic mixture of sympathy and moral awareness—whose fundamental hypocrisy suggests its own limitations, and the futility of any notion whatsoever of insular safety.

These stories are major achievements, characterized by an intellectual thorniness that lifts them above the kind of partisan polemics that simply rage against the palaces of injustice. Gordimer may not always be the most meticulous stylist—too many of her sentences seem hastily thrown together—but her critical eye doesn't falter. Of course, her publishers tend to emphasize her novels rather than her short stories in their publicity; her "FSG Bio," for instance, mentions ten of her novels by name, while making only passing mention of her seven previous story collections. But *Jump* deserves to be regarded among this author's major work.

While Gordimer's collection would certainly be in the running, I have to admit that the best book I read this quarter—among the best I've read in several years—was something written by one of those venerable white males I had intended to avoid this time out. But the pull of *Two Lives*,[6] William Trevor's latest, proved too strong for me, and now that I've read it I cannot let it pass without notice, even in a

[5] JUMP AND OTHER STORIES, by *Nadine Gordimer*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $20.00.

[6] TWO LIVES, by *William Trevor*. Viking. $21.95.

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chronicle that purports to be about underheard voices. *Two Lives* (a rather innocuous title, I think, for such a disturbing book) consists of two shortish novels, each focusing on the life of a woman who has come, in her later years, upon a serious crisis.

Mary Louise Dallon, the protagonist of "Reading Turgenev," has entered into an unfortunate marriage. Her husband, a local draper named Elmer Quarry, is "the only well-to-do Protestant for miles around" in a rural Irish county where most of the wealth is passing into Catholic hands. Mary Louise is hardly a fortune hunter (in fact, the Quarry wealth proves to be much more modest than expected), but she does see the marriage as a way of escaping the family farm and moving to town. Elmer, meanwhile, has his own reasons for matrimony; Quarry males have been wedding local girls for generations, mainly to produce heirs.

Naturally, the match proves loveless, and begins unraveling almost before it begins. Elmer, discovering himself to be impotent, turns to drink, while Mary Louise, driven to distraction by Elmer's two dreary, nagging sisters, finds herself prey to a deepening despair—until, that is, she falls in love with her cousin Robert, one of those sensitive, sickly young men straight out of the Romantic literature. They begin to spend time together, lying around in an overgrown graveyard and reading aloud passages from Turgenev. Eventually, Mary Louise's time with Robert becomes an alternative existence for her, a rich and secret shadow life to which she can turn in order to transcend the banalities of her married existence.

In outline, the story so far sounds almost like a pulp romance, but Trevor is up to something far more subversive here. When Robert dies suddenly, Mary Louise finds herself unwilling to give up the shadow life she shared with him. In fact, she decides to maintain it almost intact. She secretly purchases many of Robert's belongings at an estate sale and sets them up in a disused attic in the Quarry home; then she proceeds to live out the life of blissful domesticity she and Robert never achieved. She's mad, of course, and Elmer is eventually forced to send her away to an institution, where she passes more than three decades of her life. But her madness is a creative act, an embracing of life rather than a retreat from it. It is "a refuge in which her love affair could spread itself, a safe house offering sanctuary. For thirty-one years she passed as mad and was at peace."

A subtly similar creative act is depicted in "My House In Umbria," the second novel of the volume. Here the protagonist is Emily Delahunty, an aging Englishwoman who has settled in Italy after a rather checkered life as an orphan, child abuse victim, prostitute, and best-selling romance novelist. She's just about to start a new novel—she has the first line in her head—when, on a train to Milan, she is very nearly blown up by a terrorist bomb. During her long recuperation, she befriends some of the others who were also on that train—an old English widower known as the General, a young

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German named Otmar, and a little American child, Aimee. To relieve them of the dreariness of hospital life, Emily takes them all back to her villa, a semiofficial tourist pension that proves to be well suited to use as a convalescent home.

Together in the house, this unlikely quartet attempts to reassemble what is left of their lives. Each of Emily's guests has lost more than Emily herself ever had—the General has lost a daughter, Otmar his fiancée, and Aimee, whose trauma is so great that she cannot be made to speak, her parents and brother. But Emily is as damaged psychologically as anyone. She is nagged by the senselessness of what she invariably calls "the outrage," an act for which no terrorist group ever claims responsibility. She also finds herself incapable of getting beyond the first line of her novel. But "survival is a complicated business," as Emily herself is wont to say, and soon the same creative force that was key to Mary Louise's survival in "Reading Turgenev" begins to work again here, triggered by the arrival on the scene of Aimee's uncle, a man called Riversmith. Emily begins to experience a feeling—"of a story developing around us, of small, daily details apparently imbued with a significance that was as yet mysterious." The feeling intensifies until one evening, emerging from a fog of alcohol and frustrated passion, the story seems suddenly to reveal itself to her—the story behind the outrage, and behind what preceded and followed it in those four unfortunate lives. This revelation, of course, is probably a delusion, but it is at least something concrete, an explanation to tie together the wildly flung bits and pieces of reality.

Thus the two lives of the book's title are shown to be cunningly related—two stories about the necessity of story-making. And although Trevor claims to have written the novels independently, they work together beautifully and intricately, creating a combined effect that is nothing less than ravishing. In a season that saw the appearance of too many overwritten, overlong self-advertisements masquerading as novels (I won't mention any names), *Two Lives* stands out as a work of real dignity and worth.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Mailer's Main Event

SIX WEEKS AGO ONE OF THE LARGER PIECES OF MAIL ever received turned up at my front door in the form of a dauntingly wrapped copy of *Harlot's Ghost*, all four pounds of it.[1] It was mid-semester break, my sinuses were full of misery, and I settled in, if somewhat warily, to ingest Mailer's longest book. Somewhat warily since a trusted friend, having read it in proof, termed it a disaster; and since *Newsweek*'s Peter Prescott, a pretty good reviewer of fiction, had just called it "a dry and dusty thing . . . for nearly all of its incredibly long way." Would *Harlot* pass Wyndham Lewis' "Taxi-Cab Driver Test for 'Fiction'"? The test may be administered, with or without a cab driver, by opening any novel at its first page and seeing whether it looks like "fiction"—with all that word connotes about the diverting, the agreeably "made-up," the "interesting" story line—or something rather different, namely art. Here is a little more than the first page of *Harlot's Ghost*:

> On a late-winter evening in 1983, while driving through fog along the Maine coast, recollections of old campfires began to drift into the March mist, and I thought of the Abnaki Indians of the Algonquin tribe who dwelt near Bangor a thousand years ago.
>
> In the spring, after the planting of corn, the younger braves and squaws would leave the aged to watch over the crops and the children, and would take their birchbark canoes south for the summer. Down the Penobscot River they would travel to Blue Hill Bay on the western side of Mount Desert where my family's house, built in part by my great-great-grandfather, Doane Hadlock Hubbard, still stands. It is called the Keep, and I do not know of all else it keeps, but some Indians came ashore to build lean-tos each summer, and a few of their graves are among us, although I do not believe they came to our island to die. Lazing in the rare joys of northern warmth, they must have shucked clams on the flats at low tide and fought and fornicated among the spruce and hemlock when the water was up. What they got drunk on I do not know, unless it was the musk of each other, but many a rocky beach in the first hollow behind the shore sports mounds of ancient clamshells, ground to powder by the centuries, a beach behind the beach to speak of ancient summer frolics. The ghosts of these Indians may

[1] HARLOT'S GHOST, by *Norman Mailer*. Random House. $35.00.

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> no longer pass through our woods, but something of their old sorrows and pleasures joins the air. Mount Desert is more luminous than the rest of Maine.

Given the present state of things American, I suppose one may give a momentary thought to George Walker Bush and his trailing clouds of ancestral glory. But the ghosts of more formidable American predecessors haunt the passage (I hear Thoreau, Melville, Hemingway and Fitzgerald in it) and hold out for the reader a promise that is the promise of art—one not to be easily satisfied by any mere novel.

In one sense, as reviewers have pointed out, the promise is unfulfilled insofar as the novel's art fails to resolve certain issues raised early on. *Harlot's Ghost* consists of two disproportionately related sections. The first, titled "Omega" (the last shall be first, evidently), is just over a hundred pages and located on a day in 1983 when the novel's protagonist Herrick Hubbard (mostly though not always called Harry) is driving back from a liaison in Bath with his mistress, Chloe, to his wife, Kittredge, and their island keep off Mt. Desert. The second section, titled "Alpha," consumes the book's remaining 1200 pages and is an account of Harry's life and times, from private school days and a Yale degree up through his enlistment, training and service in the CIA between 1955 and 1965. Both sections, we are to understand, are manuscripts written by Harry, the second of which ends almost twenty years short of where the first begins. In an italicized concluding note to the reader dated "Moscow, 1984" (Harry has gone there to look for his godfather, Hugh Tremont Montague—the "Harlot" of the title—who may either be dead or have defected to the Soviets), Harry admits that he might never finish "the book of Harry Hubbard and his years in Saigon, nor the stretch of service in the White House when one lived through Watergate, no, nor the commencement of my love affair with Kittredge." (Kittredge was married to Hugh Montague but left him for Harry after her and Hugh's son was killed in a rock-climbing accident from which the father survived, but in a wheelchair.) So there are lots of loose ends, and the book concludes with the tease, "To be continued."

Behind and not very far behind Harry is of course Norman Mailer who weighs in on page 1284 with an Author's Note in which he tells us that the book was written "with the part of my mind that has lived in the CIA for forty years." He calls his novel "the product of a veteran imagination that has pondered the ambiguous and fascinating moral presence of the Agency in our national life for the last four decades." This mention of four decades takes us back to the beginning of veteran Mailer's literary career, to the publication in 1948 of *The Naked and the Dead*, and to the ensuing books that make up so unusual and controversial a road taken.

In considering the sheer bulk of *Harlot's Ghost*, we remind ourselves

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that gigantism has always been the keynote of Mailer's imaginative plans for himself. In a preface to his first (unpublished until a 1977 facsimile edition of it) novel, *A Transit to Narcissus*, he notes that even before *The Naked and the Dead* he must have written a million or so words in stories and various drafts of *Transit*. In *Advertisements for Myself* (1959), itself an outrageous and mainly fascinating display of a novelistic ego's demands, his "advertisement" for "The Man Who Studied Yoga" divulged plans for the eight-part novel to which "Yoga" was prologue. The prologue's hero, Sam Slovoda, would dream eight stages in the travels of a mythical hero, Sergius O'Shaugnessy, "through many worlds, through pleasure, business, communism, church, working class, crime, homosexuality and mysticism." "Not a modest novel," he went on to admit—and not one that was going to get written. After finishing a draft of *The Deer Park* Mailer tells us that he abandoned the scheme; but in the very next paragraph he directs us to fragments later in *Advertisements* which are said to be "from that long novel which has come into my mind again, a descendant of *Moby Dick*" (what else?). One of the fragments referred to is "The Time of Her Time" in which Sergius, settled in his Village loft, gives instruction in bullfighting and—in his avocation as self-styled sex saint—initiates Denise Gondelman into the mysteries of the orgasm. The big book of which "Time" was to be a part, confided Mailer, would take at least ten years and be, by the standards of 1959, probably unpublishable.

In all their superficial contradictions and inconsistencies, these early extravagant claims are worth noting for the way they bring out a deeper consistency in Mailer's vision of himself and his projection of that self onto a reader. In other words, it was not just in the recent *Ancient Evenings* or in *The Executioner's Song* that Mailer went too far: excess, from the beginning, was of the essence of the scene. But what marks "The Man Who Studied Yoga," and even more "The Time of Her Time" as important expansive moments in Mailer's literary career, is that each of them in its different way is entertaining. To apply one of Frost's formulations about his own poetry, it feels as though the writer were entertaining ideas (or scenarios or characters) to see if they entertained him. This was a feeling one did not get from Mailer's writing in *The Naked and the Dead* or *Barbary Shore*. For one thing there is more comedy in the shorter pieces: like the story (from "Yoga") about how Cassius O'Shaugnessy unscrewed his navel and the disastrous event it led to (his ass fell off); or like New York City's garbage wars as observed by Sergius (in "Time") when he heads into the Lower East Side to look for help in cleaning up his apartment and encounters a gang of kids at play:

> They were charming, these six-year-olds, as I told my uptown friends, and they used to topple the overloaded garbage cans, strew them through the street, have summer snowball fights with orange

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> peel, coffee grounds, soup bones, slop, they threw the discus by sailing the raw tin rounds from the tops of cans, their pillow fights were with loaded socks of scum, and a debauch was for two of them to scrub a third around the inside of a twenty-gallon pail still warm with the heat of its emptied treasures.

There is an ease and confidence about these supple observings which would animate some of the best writing—fictional or non—Mailer produced in his great decade, the 1960s.

When fiction pays attention to what people eat or what happens to their garbage, human relationships are anchored in homely rather than ethereal circumstances. So food plays a lively role in *Harlot's Ghost* as a handy indicator of character and social milieu. Over the course of the book Harry has a number of good meals at the likes of Harvey's Restaurant and Sans Souci, but occasionally partakes of more humble fare. During his weeks of testing at the CIA's I-J-K-L complex in Washington (prior to the agency's move to Langley, Virginia in 1961), he takes a course in World Communism from a Commie hater named Raymond James ("Ray Jim") Burns:

> On our last night, Bullseye Burns threw a party for our class in his small apartment in a newly built four-story complex of middle-cost housing in the outskirts of Alexandria, Virginia. He had three kids, all boys, all towheads, and I learned on this night that he and his wife were high school sweethearts from Indiana. Mrs. Burns, plain-faced, slab-shaped, served us the casserole dish of cheese and tuna and hot dog relish that had been her party fare for twenty years. (Or, as she called it, her "main-eventer.") It was obvious that she and Ray Jim barely bothered to speak to each other anymore. . . . I concluded that people like Jim Ray did not quit their marriages until they were feeling inclined to take an ax to their mate.

That casserole has the right slab-like ingredients and harmonizes nicely with the narrator's genial reversing of Ray Jim into Jim Ray. A second passage of cookery is rather more spicy: Harry, now posted to his first assignment in Berlin under the novel's most colorful character (and a historical personage to boot), William King ("King Bill") Harvey, prepares to leave a nightclub called *Die Hintertür* with his German mistress-to-be Ingrid:

> Ingrid was also eating an enormous "Grilled American" of Westphalian ham, tomatoes, and Muenster cheese. I sat down beside her in twitchy detumescence while she slogged down a vast mug of beer, thereby communicating to me in twenty minutes how profoundly one might, over twenty years, come to dislike the eating habits of a mate. Poor Ingrid. The Back Door, as she put it to me with a

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> toothsome grin, never allowed their help enough of food and drink to produce more than a goat turd for the other back door. On this night, therefore, in which my own sphincter had almost played a prominent role, insight came over me at last: I was in the presence of German Humor. *Die Hintertür.* I got it. A nightclub for assholes.

I quote these passages not because they contain anything of special significance to the story and its thematic preoccupations—although Harry's allusion to his sphincter in the second exhibit refers to a proposition rejected earlier that evening from his unscrupulous rogue colleague (and another of the book's best-drawn characters) Dix Butler. They illustrate rather a level of writing, frequent in the book, that in its breezily informal conduct appears to be unashamedly enjoying itself. One thinks again (I do) of Frost asking rhetorically in an interview, "What do I want to communicate but what a *hell* of a good time I had writing it?" Mailer often seems to be having a good time constructing the sentences and paragraphs in *Harlot's Ghost*, and this spirit can be infectious. Despite all the fuss generated by his harping on the largeness of his ambitions—to get into the ring with Tolstoy, write the longest novel or the successor to *Moby Dick*—much of his page-to-page invention takes place with an idiom and material no more elevated than the ones just quoted. Quite simply, they are where most of the action is.

At least two prominent reviews of *Harlot's Ghost* would have us believe that action to be of little consequence. John Simon (*NY Times Book Review*, Sept. 29) rehearsed, step by step, the plot (an old gambit of his) under the assumption that readers would perceive the inherent ludicrousness of Mailer's enterprise. (Plots can be made to look pretty silly when extracted from the novel's prose and displayed to readers who have not yet read the novel.) And Louis Menand, always a sharp-minded critic, behaved in *The New Yorker* (November 4) as if the whole thing were totally misconceived. In Menand's view, Mailer was trying to do ten things at once and had succeeded in finishing none of them. Compared with 1960s Mailer—the writer whom people of Menand's generation read (said he) for an "aggressive and great-souled refusal to cater to sanctimony, whether it was the establishment or the establishment's enemies"—*Harlot's Ghost* was much too easy on the CIA and American foreign policy over the past decades. Mailer's unwillingness to challenge and provoke thus produced a flaccid novel. Menand also complains about the large amount of "Alpha" devoted to letters between Harry—from his various outposts in Berlin, Uruguay (where he works under E. Howard Hunt) and Florida (Bay of Pigs time)—and Kittredge, who herself works for the agency, in exactly what capacity it is not fully clear. "The most disembodied fictional love affair outside *Clarissa*," Menand calls it.

Nobody ever wished *Clarissa* longer, but one does keep turning its pages as the warfares and stratagems between men and men, men and

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women, women and women, unfold. If Mailer can be compared to Richardson, it could just possibly be as a master of narrative, and so much the better for Mailer. (It is also true that, as with *Clarissa*, not all the letters in *Harlot's Ghost* are of equal interest and vitality.) As for Mailer's unwillingness to challenge and provoke, it may have to do with the fact that as he moves toward seventy he finds it harder to take on the loudly aggressive calling-to-court of America's politicians which excited Louis Menand (and others of us) three decades ago. Recall the end of his contribution to a *Partisan Review* statement about Vietnam in which, shockingly, he put forth the possibility that Vietnam was a "happening" staged by Lyndon Johnson because he could not control things at home:

> Cause if it is, Daddy Warbucks, couldn't we have the happening just with the Marines and skip all that indiscriminate roast tit and naked lunch, all those bombed-out ovaries, Mr. J., Mr. L.B.J., Boss Man of Show Biz—I salute you in your White House Oval; I mean America will shoot all over the shithouse wall if this jazz goes on, Jim.

"Jim" indeed! In *Harlot's Ghost* this vivid idiom, put in the service of a rather different politics, characterizes King Bill Harvey: "That's why we go into every skirmish with the KGB under a handicap. That's why we even have to classify the toilet paper in the crap house. We must keep reminding ourselves to enclave the poop." The other figure who talks this way and makes a single, memorable appearance in the book is Lenny Bruce, who addresses a nightclub audience of which Harlot, Kittredge and Harry are part: "That first show was terrific, in fact, if I say so myself, it was so good that I came . . . Yes I came, and now I feel out of it. Ah, fellows, I have to get it up for the second time." Kittredge and her husband are appalled; Harry tells us that he has never heard such laughter in a nightclub before: "Laughs slithered out of people like snakes, tore out of them, barked forth, wheezed forth, screamed out."

We presume Harry is not laughing that way, since typically he is detached and contemplative in his response to excessiveness. His own language and idiom are un-hipsterish, an exception being some hopped-up language in "Omega" where he describes lovemaking with his mistress in Time-of-her-time Maileresque: "With Chloe it was get ready for rush, get ready for the sale, whoo-e, gushers, we'd hit oil together. Recuperating he felt low-down and slimy and rich as the earth. You could grow flowers out of your ass." Throughout "Alpha," by contrast, he is the nice (though Wasp) Jewish boy that has always been one of the parts of Mailer's identity. There is a strategy here: Harry needs to be relatively sane, fearful, prudent, sometimes uncertain, in order to set off in all its weird craziness CIA doings in Berlin, Uruguay (a particularly pointless, far-out bunch of "doings") and Cuba. Louis Menand points our rightly that the agency is Mailer's

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Circumlocution Office, and surely Dickens may be invoked in connection with this too-long book. After all, how lumbering, badly plotted and sometimes inertly written is *Little Dorrit* in its modest 968 pages. How John Simon might have wished about *Dorrit* that Dickens, like Thomas Wolfe, had had a great editor; how awkwardly Menand would find its different sections to stand in their relationship to one another.

In Carl Rollyson's new and nicely discriminating biography of Mailer, he makes the claim about him that no American writer, not even Hemingway, has "so fused the invention of a literary style with the creation of a writer's identity."[2] The claim is made during a discussion of *Advertisements*, especially "The White Negro" and "The Time of Her Time," and it makes sense with respect to those aggressively challenging, sexually and racially combative, efforts. But with *Harlot's Ghost* it is impossible to identify *a* literary style discernible on every page and ascribable to the novel as a whole; or rather let us say that the very inclusiveness of Mailer's narrative voice is such as to accommodate perceptions ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous. To make things further complicated, that voice refuses to provide guidance on how to tell one level from the other. Early in "Omega," Harry's car, on its way back to Mt. Desert, goes into a severe skid just at the moment when its driver remembers how he and Kittredge pledged there would be honesty between them. Fortunately for Harry, it is a three-hundred-sixty degree skid that leaves him still headed for home and "beyond fear":

> I felt as if I had fallen out of a ten-story window, landed in a fireman's net, and was now strolling around in a glow and a daze. "*Millions of creatures,*" I said aloud to the empty car—actually said it aloud!—"*walk the earth unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep,*" after which, trundling along at thirty miles an hour, too weak and exhilarated to stop, I added in salute to the lines just recited, "Milton, *Paradise Lost,*" and thought of how Chloe and I had gotten up from bed in her trailer on the outskirts of Bath a couple of hours ago and had gone for a farewell drink to a cocktail lounge with holes in the stuffing of the red leatherette booths.

From unfallen Adam's voice in Book IV of Milton's poem to the holes in those red leatherette booths is only as far as from the beginning of a sentence to its end, a distance negotiated with no particular fuss by the narrative voice. Unlike the tense polemical thrusts of early Mailer (the writer as bullfighter or boxer or cocksman), this relaxed, expansive voice (all too expansive, detractors would say) can entertain

[2] THE LIVES OF NORMAN MAILER: A Biography, by *Carl Rollyson*. Paragon House. $26.95.

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widely different perspectives and not be overwhelmed by them. Like the style of early Mailer, this one is explorative, but in a less threatened and threatening way. You might almost call it mellow. The inclusiveness of range in latest Mailer means that while Harry can rise to heights of spiritual self-definition—as when, a newly-recruited CIA man, he thinks that "Happiness was the resonance one knows in the heart when the ends of oneself come to concordance in the morning air"—he stays enough in touch with earthly things to produce, when the occasion demands it, a good joke:

> "Why won't Baptists," I asked her, "make love standing up?"
> "Why won't they?"
> "Because people might think they were dancing."

In perhaps the most perceptive review the book has received, Thomas R. Edwards (*New Republic,* Nov. 25) shrewdly suggests that *Harlot's Ghost* invites itself to be thought of as something like religious epic, "Mailer's *Paradise Lost*, as it were, in which the cold war could figure as the War in Heaven, the Creation, and the Fall." He goes on to note the fusion of sacred and secular levels in various characters from the novel. It should be clear from my own focus that what seems to me the book's major mode of performance is religious epic gone askew, the way CIA operations do; in other words—and since, as Kenneth Burke reminds us, comedy is the literary form which sees human beings as necessarily *mistaken*—this religious epic is a comic one. Edwards concludes his review by quoting Samuel Johnson on *Paradise Lost* in a passage I wish I had found myself but will shamelessly appropriate nonetheless:

> To paint things as they are requires a minute attention, and employs the memory rather than the fancy. Milton's delight was to sport in the wide regions of possibility; reality was a scene too narrow for his mind. He sent his fancies out upon discovery, into worlds where only imagination can travel, and delighted to form new modes of existence, and furnish sentiment and action to superior beings, to trace the councils of hell, or accompany the choirs of heaven.

Edwards notes that these terms have something to do with spying; they also bring out the overweeningness of Milton's and of Mailer's imagination. For both imaginations, reality is a scene too narrow. It is even possible that having Harry remember the Milton line with the word "spiritual" left out (Adam tells Eve in the poem that "Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth / Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep") is Mailer's way of de-spiritualizing his religious epic and playing up the comic-grotesque possibilities of spying gone over the edge. In Milton's line, the spiritual creatures behold God's work

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"with ceaseless praise" both day and night; Mailer's creatures are more equivocal, even just plain strange, and perhaps of the devil's party without knowing it.

Maybe, after all, any modern epic has to be comic and satiric, less like *Paradise Lost* than like Byron's "Vision of Judgment":

> The angels all were singing out of tune
> And hoarse with having little else to do,
> Excepting to wind up the sun and moon
> Or curb a runaway young star or two . . .
>
> The guardian seraphs had retired on high,
> Finding their charges past all care below.

At the end of *Harlot's Ghost* Harry acknowledges that he has not, like Milton, quite risen to the height of his great argument: "Unlike God I have not been able to present all of my creation." For too many years we have observed the critics lamenting Mailer's failure to live up to this or that, his immense talent wasted on various misconceived enterprises, his preoccupation with X when clearly he should have been occupied with Y. My own attitude is closer to Dryden's on Chaucer: if Mailer the novelist fails to live up to God, he still has given us God's plenty.

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MARK JARMAN

The Curse of Discursiveness

C. G. JUNG DISCOVERED THAT AS MUCH of a patient's unconscious could be revealed by having him freely associate with letters from the Cyrillic alphabet as by the more traditional psychoanalytic method of working from the patient's dreams. My own experience reading John Ashbery's new book-length poem[1] proves Jung correct. Time and again I found what Ashbery himself refers to as the "appealing nonsense" of the poem a stimulus for the associations of my own mind. Or better yet, I recalled the protagonist's dilemma in Ashbery's "The Instruction Manual," from his first book, *Some Trees*. He admits that he wishes he "did not have to write the instruction manual on the uses of a new metal" and finds himself, instead, dreaming of Guadalajara. I knew exactly how that dreamer felt each time I guided myself back into *Flow Chart*. The poem is more flow than chart. Its discursiveness is more a ramble from topic to topic—if topic is the right word—than a coherent argument from point to point.

The only time I thought I knew where I was was during passages of self-reference, when the poet acknowledged my presence as a reader:

> And if I told you
> this was your life, not some short story for a
> contest, how would you react?
> Chances are you'd tell me to buzzoff and continue
> writing . . .

Ashbery has always displayed a droll wit. Here it has given him a canny sense of what must be going through an honest reader's mind as he makes his way through what the poet calls his "wrenched narrative" as it "drips on, decays." I say honest reader, because Ashbery has many dishonest readers. They are his admirers. They include anyone who claims that a poem like *Flow Chart* is not boring, not devoid of any subject except its own composition, and not finally unrereadable. By unrereadable, I mean that, having read it once, I hope never to read it again. How can a poem do this to a reader, except by being bad? I cannot think of a single poem I have read and admired, of whatever length, that I would not willingly read again. By the time I reached page 201 of *Flow Chart*, fifteen pages from the end,

[1] FLOW CHART, by *John Ashbery*. Alfred A. Knopf. $20.00.

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and read "there is / always the possibility something may come of something, and that is our / fondest wish though it says here I'm not supposed to say so," I felt as if Ashbery and I had formed one of those bizarre intimacies kidnappers and hostages form. I had tried to cooperate and he knew it. Also on page 201, he writes:

> Excuse me while I fart. There, that's better.
> I actually feel relieved.

This is the only declaration in the poem not shaded into evasive circumlocution. Still, it reflects the poem's existence as a running commentary on the poet at his typewriter. The poem makes a kind of musical noise, something like the easy listening jazz of the Windham Hill productions. But why is it in chapters? Why sections? Why even page numbers? They must be part of the joke. I think that, unlike his admirers, Emperor Ashbery knows he is naked.

Robert Creeley's new volume of selected poems[2] shows that he has written some of the finest lyrics in American poetry, most of which he published in the 1960s. He was at the peak of his powers in that decade. Since then he has written only two or three poems to equal his best. Still, in the Age of Ashbery, one wishes more attention were paid to a poet, like Creeley, who weighs not only every word but often every syllable.

> I approach with such
> a careful tremor, always
> I feel the finally foolish
>
> question of how it is,
> then, supposed to be felt,
> and by whom.

So begins one of Creeley's most moving poems, "Something," from his best book, *Words*. He remembers a time with a lover that anyone who has read the poem must have indelibly printed in memory, along with its ending: "What / love might learn from such a sight." Creeley is a love poet. Love is the subject of his most memorable poems, like "Something," "The Rain," and "The Moon." Yet in his early work there are others that also justify his rank as a major poet. They include "After Lorca," "I Know a Man," "The Flower," "A Wicker Basket," and the superb longer poem—longer for Creeley—"Anger," in which his minimalism is used to its greatest effect.

During the 1970s there is a falling off in Creeley's work, mostly

[2] SELECTED POEMS, by *Robert Creeley*. University of California Press. $25.00.

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because of his indulgence in his own notebook doodling and also an Ashberyesque discursiveness. "Desultory Days" is typical, beginning:

> Desultory days,
> time's wandering
> impermanences—
>
> like, *what's for lunch*,
> Mabel?

In the 1980s Creeley recovers some of the excitement, the drama of an active syntax that galvanized his early work. It is present in these stanzas from "The Edge":

> I take the world and lose it,
> miss it, misplace it,
> put it back or try to, can't
>
> find it, fool it, even feel it.
> The snow from a high sky,
> grey, floats down to me softly.

Poems like "Self-Portrait," a bitter examination to put beside any of Philip Larkin's, and the heartrending "Mother's Voice," the best of his elegies for his mother, have the old dynamism. "Age," too, is a late masterpiece, ending on a sense of "imploding / *self*." But Creeley's style does not bear up through many poems. At times banal, conventional, even clichéd statement is laid down over his unique lineation but not transformed. He is still best when he dramatizes or speaks to a lover, as in "The Rain":

> Love, if you love me,
> lie next to me.
> Be for me, like rain,
> the getting out
>
> of the tiredness, the fatuousness, the semi-
> lust of intentional indifference.
> Be wet
> with a decent happiness.

James Tate has also published a selected poems[3] and it is good to have it. He has edited himself well, but he, too, sometimes shows the consequences of emulating Ashbery. Luckily his other influences—

[3] SELECTED POEMS, by *James Tate*. Wesleyan/University Press of New England. $27.50; $14.95.

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from Roethke, Berryman, Justice, and Plath—are so strong and so healthy, he remains largely untainted. His is a poetry of connections, from first to last. Its means and the surreal menagerie of his imagination may be irksome, but in the end it conveys the emotions of a profoundly lonely individual who is trying to reach out, as he says in "Dear Reader" "to pry open your casket / with this burning snowflake."

Like Creeley, Tate is a lyric poet, but his are mainly songs of alienation. *The Lost Pilot*, his first book, is still a wonderful read and one can tell why it excited people when it appeared twenty-five years ago. Its zest and good humor are hard not to like, even as the poet reveals his baffling sense of loneliness. The story the book tells characterizes Tate's generation, as well. The absence of Tate's father, the lost pilot of the title, symbolizes the gulf between generations during that vivid decade. Poems like "For Mother on Father's Day" and the title poem move through short lines, in tercets, in a deft way reminiscent both of Sylvia Plath's charged-up, compressed imagery and Donald Justice's elegant exactitude. Tate's comic but accessible surrealism continues throughout *The Oblivion Ha Ha*. It contains the splendid "Shadowboxing," probably the key poem of his work, and the fine, but atypical, "Failed Tribute to the Stonemason for Tor House, Robinson Jeffers." "It's Not the Heat So Much as the Humidity" is representative of the Tate who loves to send up his own poetic posturing with a comic image that still resonates:

> When Autumn comes, O when Fall arrives
> in her chemise of zillion colors,
> I will sigh noisily, as if an old and
> disgusting leg had finally dropped off.

Hints to Pilgrims contains a curious foray into the territory Ashbery was exploring at the same time, in poems like his "Fragment." That Tate calls his asyntactical nightmare "Amnesia People" shows he can match Ashbery's wit. *Absences* is the last book, published before Tate was thirty, that contains more strong poems than weak ones. "Contagion" is Tate at his melancholy finest, and "The Distant Orgasm" is still splendid—funny, vital, ironic, with a youthful appeal we find in Keats, Rimbaud, and Dylan Thomas. But in this book are also the long sequences, like "Absences" and "Cycle of Dust," whose hermeticism characterizes so much of the later work. In the subsequent books, *Viper Jazz*, *Riven Doggeries*, *Constant Defender*, and *Reckoner*, selected from here, there are good poems, but not so many as in the earlier books. "Read the Great Poets" in *Viper Jazz* has some of the knowing self-satire of "The Distant Orgasm" but with an admixture of desperation. "Tell Them Was Here" in *Constant Defender* is also first rate, one of Tate's best ever. Stood up at an appointment, the speaker leaves a note to his "Unreliable ancestors!"

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> Green was here, I scrawled
> on a scrap of paper, and stuck it
> inside the screen. Started to leave,
>
> turned, scratched out my name—
> then wrote it back again.

Tate observes the conventions of narrative, argument, even discursiveness, yet still aims to avoid all predictability. Most of the time we are treated to surreal parables and self-revelations in a style that, in the 1960s and early 1970s, spawned more imitators per little magazine page than any before in America, and that now exists solely in the master's hand.

I'll bet the poems in Ann Lauterbach's fourth book[1] sound pretty interesting when read aloud, as a sort of word-jazz, again of the Windham Hill variety. Like so many of Ashbery's ephebes, she cops his riffs without his sense of humor. *Clamor* is a book of noise punctuated by embarrassing howlers. In "Mountain Roads," the poet says, "It we say often, and it is always the same it." The poems in this book are constantly proposing an *it*—that thing poets must try to define—and never telling us what the poet has in mind, except to offer unforgettable, ingenuous hermetica, as in "Forgetting the Lake":"Everything I am thinking of rhymes with *spires*." All one can say in response is "Surely not *everything*." When Lauterbach does attempt a metaphor, it is also subject to the reader's skepticism. In "Day," she claims, "The sky I say is an adulating glass." Yeah? Well, I say it isn't. And in the title poem, she slings abstractions around in a void, stating, "Affection is merciless." One can try to imagine a context for that statement. This is doubtlessly her aim as a poet—to make the reader imagine a context. But this reader can only question in which contexts affection *would* be merciless. I like her best when she spouts something ridiculous as if it were a profound truth. In "Further Thematics" she avers, "The salad bar attests to basic freedoms." Julia Child or M.F.K. Fisher might say that, with a wink, but Ann Lauterbach is tediously earnest and sententious. In "Boy Sleeping," when she asks, "Should I tell him his face mirrors the lost?" I want to intervene and say, "Let him sleep!"

I read this book with a growing sense of irritation, relieved only by the hilarity of so much silly writing. The poet continually begs the question, veering away, because she has nothing to impart. Unlike the missing portions of Italian Renaissance frescoes, in which paint has come loose from its anchor of plaster, the lacunae in her poems represent only failures of imagination. Imagine bringing Piero della Franscesca back to Arezzo and persuading him that his pictures, in

[1] CLAMOR, by *Ann Lauterbach*. Viking, $17.95.

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their advanced state of deterioration, were still beautiful. Imagine wishing to emulate such sad losses, in poetry. But let the poet speak for herself. In "Annotation" she says,

> To say sky in the face of sky
> Is a failure of duration;
> The sky escapes.

W.H. Auden in "In Praise of Limestone" says that the poet is "admired for his earnest habit of calling / the sun the sun." But apparently, for Ann Lauterbach, even to name a thing is to betray it with the mystification of language, all of which is metaphor. Thus, her own idiom is made up of inapposite images and variable, unfixed abstractions. The one poem in *Clamor* that achieves something like a sustained artistic effect is "Prom in Toledo Night." It is reminiscent of James Tate's "Amnesia People." But the only speck of humor in it is the epigraph from Michael Palmer: "La—la—la is the germ of sadness / said the speaker in sneakers." Without the wit to see that a poetry of non-representation is in itself absurd, Ann Lauterbach cannot be tolerated for long without a laugh, either at her invitation or her expense.

There is a handful of successful poems in Thylias Moss's fourth book.[5] One of them, "Poem for My Mothers and Other Makers of Asafetida," which contains the phrase that is the book's title, is first rate. These poems succeed for many of the same reasons that the others fail. Moss constructs an elaborate syntax, often discursive, yet seeking always to make distant connections and to illuminate them by the flame of her insight and imagination. When she succeeds, the results are breathtaking:

> Live to the fullest and just
> have more to lose to death but Grandma said,
> Mama says, now
> I say: *maybe possible to have so much*
> *death can't take it all*; asafetida still on
> the shelf, oil in the puddle
> still ghetto stained glass, still rainbow
> remnants in rock
> bottom ghetto sky like a promise of no more
> tears, asafetida
> bottle floating there, some kind of Moses,
> some kind of deliverer,
> there's always a way.

[5] RAINBOW REMNANTS IN ROCK BOTTOM GHETTO SKY, by *Thylias Moss*. Persea. $9.95p.

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But often Moss does not find her way. Though every poem contains something brought to radiance, many poems begin nebulously and grope their way to an almost crystallized argument-in-an-image; or, after a clear start, the poem ends in murk. Sometimes the murk is opaque syntax; sometimes it is changing subject in midstream. "Birmingham Brown's Turn" has examples of both, plus some unfortunate cultural stereotyping:

> You can bet that Charlie can take you
> to the cleaners; isn't he Chinese?
> Don't they boil the clothes and the
>
> rice in the same woks? . . .
>
> I still dream of it, digging to China,
> going through the center of the earth's
> meaning to earn passage there.

Moss's large and expansive poems many times seem like exercises in association. She gives us everything she has thought of without pruning. I am ambivalent about the necessity of all the verbiage in her poems, but recognize that she is trying to manipulate a narrative syntax that poets like Norman Dubie and Roger Weingarten have often worked with. The difference between these poets and Moss is that she is not narrative at all. Charles Simic, who chose her book for the National Poetry Series, calls her a "visionary storyteller," but she tells no stories. She pirouettes in place, flinging sparks and cinders. The book is quite a performance. Curiously one of the best poems is "Interpretation of a Poem by Frost." It deserves a place in future anthologies and ends movingly with an echo of Frost's most famous poem:

> She has promises to keep . . .
> And miles to go, more than the distance from
> Africa to Andover
> more than the distance from black to white . . .

I wish I liked all the poems better than I do, but while I admire their ambition, I find that Moss shows a kind of complacence in assuming that putting one thing on one side of an equals sign and one on another is imagination. Consider her image of a bible in "Congregations."

> His bible warms his hands, never
> leaves them, a dialysis, transfusion that keeps
> him alive . . .

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A dialysis is not a transfusion. In "Time for Praise," extending a metaphor of a car as a whale that has swallowed Jonah and his family, she is led to call a Toyota, "a whale with a door." Finally, this is the first poet I have encountered who, in the poem "News," actually has used the word *hopefully* as it is currently employed, which is to say incorrectly. Moss's errors appear to be the result of hurried composition. Often they are part of her poetry's dazzling improvisatory effects, but just as often they are not.

Lynda Hull's second book[6] is full of poems in which history, narrative complexity, symbolism, and the lyricism of a passionate voice all work together. Her narrative technique is cinematic, often striving for simultaneity, and fuguelike. "Shore Leave," one of her best poems, is like a filmed memory of the poet's rakish father, set with New York City in the background, in an illusory present-tense piece-of-time. The character of the father in "Shore Leave" is a model for other male characters, preserved in the poet's memory, who descend into and rise from the underworld or the demimonde. Hull writes like Persephone back from hell. Behind her are drug addiction and the seductive charm of life on the margins. Hers is not an imagination that yokes any old things together, but one disciplined by intelligence into making magic equations. Here, in "The Real Movie, with Stars," is an unforgettable moment typical of much in this book:

> I took the kiss full on the mouth, sweet fruit,
> miraculous
> chemistry of salts and water that keeps the flesh,
> that swells
>
> and spills and feels so like weeping.

I would like to say something about every poem in this book, because the whole collection is so compelling, but I will stick to a few standouts. "Gateway to Manhattan" seems one of the best contemporary poems about New York City. Examining her sympathy for a woman who has attempted suicide in a public toilet, the poet says to herself:

> She'd have nothing but contempt for you, guilty
> and standing here
> long past the last train, waiting for the police
> sweep,
> waiting for the clamp on the wrist, concrete
> sweating against your forehead.
> It's almost time for the sirens to begin,
> the shaking,
> a trembling from within.

[6] STAR LEDGER, by *Lynda Hull*. University of Iowa Press. $9.95p.

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Hull is impassioned about the doomed and doomed men in particular. The most moving and forceful instance in her poems comes in her "Lost Fugue for Chet," an imagined narrative of the jazz trumpeter Chet Baker's last day in Amsterdam. Although the following passage might seem to glamourize the condition of being lost, I think it shows off a style that is just about unique in our poetry today:

> After surviving, what arrives? So what's the point
> when there are so many women, creamy callas with single
> furled petals turning in & in upon themselves
> like variations, nights when the horn's coming
>
> genius riffs, metal & spit, that rich consuming rush
> of good dope, a brief languor burnishing
> the groin, better than sex. Fuck Death.

Lynda Hull knows something about life and death and in her poetry she tells us what they are like. She does not hide her knowledge or lack of it in ruptured syntax or aimless discursiveness. She seeks and finds the connections and makes them with the experience of one who has returned from the underworld with a fire inside. When she says, "Fuck Death," I say, "Amen."

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DAVID MASON

Anne Sexton and Her Times

GREAT LITERARY BIOGRAPHIES RISE ABOVE the documentary nature of the genre to become works of literature themselves. One need not look all the way back to Boswell for an example. I think of Troyat on Tolstoy, Ellmann on Joyce, and to a lesser degree Carpenter on Auden or Judd on Ford Madox Ford. These books succeed partly by their prose styles and an almost novelistic empathy with their subjects. By such a measure, Diane Wood Middlebrook's biography of Anne Sexton is not great.[1] It is honest, workmanlike and frequently judicious. There are eloquent passages in this book, but you would never guess that its author is herself a poet. Though Ms. Middlebrook has been professional in every way, she has produced a biography that only sketchily explains the phenomena of Anne Sexton and her times.

For surely Anne Sexton was and is a phenomenon. Her rapid rise and fall, the broad appeal (and sales) of her books nearly twenty years after her suicide, and the notoriety and bestsellerdom of this biography seem peculiarly American. In no other country and at no other time than ours would the psychological—some would say therapeutic—poems of Anne Sexton have taken on such cultural force. Middlebrook is well aware of this when she writes,

> It was the accepted notion of the "abnormality" or "social insignificance" of women's experience as a subject for art that made Plath's themes of rage and vengeance so heady a model for young writers, especially women, and in America, at least, this insight fueled a social movement in which grassroots feminism was the theory, grassroots poetry the practice. Among students and among women readers, Plath and Sexton were necessary aids to understanding hysteria as resistance to social programming. Consequently, writing poetry in the manner of Plath and Sexton became a mode of consciousness-raising. Thus what a poetry reviewer might dismiss as morbid self-preoccupation, another interested reader might welcome as liberating candor. Women poets and critics, of course, had the most at stake in deciding which kind of reader to be, for gender would always be perceived as salient in their case.

[1] ANNE SEXTON: A Biography, by *Diane Wood Middlebrook*. Houghton Mifflin. $24.95.

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This is one of several passages where Middlebrook demonstrates a firm command of the contexts in which Sexton's poems are read, but I wish she had gone further, fully exploring the implications of Sexton's career. For example, she might have asked whether "hysteria" really is resistance to social programming, or whether "candor" really has much to do with what Sexton actually wrote.

Middlebrook is very good at describing the various groups of "confessional" poets who rose to prominence in the early 1960s. Sexton met Sylvia Plath in Robert Lowell's workshop at Harvard in 1959, and both women found acceptance (Sexton more than Plath) at a time when the poet's personal anguish was expected to be a frequent subject of poetry. We now know a great deal about the private lives and sufferings of these people, but Middlebrook also understands the peculiar romanticism with which poets like Plath, Berryman and Sexton dramatized their troubles. I know of no evidence that poets are more susceptible to mental illness or addiction than doctors or lawyers or street sweepers or accountants, yet writers like Sexton perpetuated the myth of the mad, alienated poet. In his 1964 book, *The Far Field*, Theodore Roethke wrote, "What's madness but nobility of soul / At odds with circumstance?" But madness is madness, every bit as specific as a broken femur; there is nothing noble about it. Anne Sexton was not sick in precisely the same way that Plath or Lowell or Roethke or Berryman were sick, yet all of them lived in a time that made it possible to lump these illnesses together under the rubric of poetry.

If there are people who have borne physical and mental illness with heroism, Anne Sexton does not seem to have been one of them. She used people relentlessly, abused her children terribly. Indeed, Middlebrook's biography leaves me feeling much more sympathy for Sexton's family than for Sexton herself. Kayo, her "husband straight as a redwood," put up with more appalling behavior than Sexton had any right to expect, and his frustrated violence, usually under the influence of alcohol, is sad. Because of this biography, the world now knows that Sexton sexually abused her daughter, Linda. For the first years of her two daughters' lives, Sexton hardly lived under the same roof with them, either because she couldn't bear to look at them or she had been shuffled off for treatment somewhere. One quickly loses count of Sexton's suicide attempts and infidelities. To be fair, she seems to have understood her own problems rather well, but ultimately they defeated her, and I also think they defeated most of her poetry.

She was from an early age more a patient than an agent (which is not to say she was undesigning), born to an upper-middle-class family with what seems to me a fairly typical experience of mental instability and social hypocrisy. One of the major drawbacks of Middlebrook's biography is that she races through the first twenty-seven years of Sexton's life at a rate of about ten pages per decade, so family history and milieu become a confusing jumble of names and places. Sexton comes alive only when she is "reborn" as a poet on page 42.

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Part of the problem, I suspect, is that Middlebrook had access to material few biographers ever see, including the controversial tapes provided by Sexton's psychiatrist, Dr. Martin Orne. Paradoxically, the wealth of documentary material at Middlebrook's disposal has resulted in literary impoverishment, preventing her from fully imagining her subject's life or filling in more of its cultural background, and as a result Sexton too often seems distant and unsympathetic. Too many passages in this book read like case history:

> The normal development of Linda and Joy into little beings demanding to be let go and nevertheless to be loved unconditionally may have broken the dam that held such a flood in place. These babies were supposed to provide Sexton's fulfillment as a woman, but instead they made demands on her emotions; rather than feeding her hunger for acceptance, they required her to respond to their separateness. As an adult she was was supposed to be able to participate intuitively in this exchange, as intuitively as her children did. But what was involuntarily called into play by their demands was her own neediness. Sexton expressed this conflict at first in bodily suffering, later in plain language to her doctor: "I want to be a child and not a mother, and I feel guilty about this."

It was Dr. Orne who encouraged Sexton to write poetry when she was an ill and discontented housewife. Her early poems were therapeutic exercises that Sexton was shrewd enough not to publish. A televised lecture on sonnets by I. A. Richards awakened her latent talent for verse forms, which was reinforced by years of workshops with John Holmes, Maxine Kumin, George Starbuck, W. D. Snodgrass and Robert Lowell. Despite John Holmes's objections to Sexton's self-dramatizations, these workshops apparently provided her with no alternative to confessionalism. In one of her most famous poems from *All My Pretty Ones* (1962) she wrote, "My friend, my friend, I was born / doing reference work in sin, and born / confessing it." Most art is in some way personal, but Sexton's illness was so given to solipsism, her entire life constructed around her needs before anyone else's, that one would think confessional poetry was precisely the wrong kind of poetry for her to be encouraged to write. In a letter to me which I have his permission to quote, Anthony Hecht relates that he once gave Sexton a copy of Aubrey's *Brief Lives* "in the hope of diverting her from her obsessive narcissism." Hecht was not alone in wishing Sexton would discover the world beyond her own problems, but it was not in the cards. Sexton was an actress, a compulsive self-dramatizer, and even if her art raises our consciousness of important social and psychological issues, it is severely compromised by the limits of her personality.

Her 1965 poem, "Suicide Note," responds to the charge of narcissism by quoting Artaud: "You speak to me of narcissism but I reply

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that it is a matter of my life." She is right, in a way, just as we would be right to recognize the insufficiency of her answer. Maxine Kumin has argued that the value of Sexton's poetry lies in its apparent openness to subjects previously deemed unsuitable for poetry. But choice of subject matter is by itself a poor criterion for aesthetic judgment. Once the shock value of Sexton's choices has worn away, we still have to determine what sort of writer she was. To attempt this, I set out to read Sexton's *Complete Poems* straight through, but the monotony of poem after poem screaming "*me me me*" in lines that were too often flaccid and clichéd defeated my best efforts. Sexton is a poet to be taken in small doses.

There are two primary views of her poetry. The first is that she was a poet whose wild subject matter required the taming discipline of rhyme and meter; therefore, her first two books contain her best work and the others, in which free verse predominates, fall away into self-parody. The second view is that she was so honest in her self-analysis that the relentless truths of her subject matter could not be helped by the sedative of traditional form; therefore it is later books like *The Awful Rowing Toward God*, written in roughly twenty days, that give us the real thing. Both of these readings are inaccurate, though I do think much of her best writing comes in the early books. *To Bedlam and Part Way Back* and *All My Pretty Ones* frequently have the virtues of good literary diaries combined with a genuine delight in language. Here, for example, is a stanza from her poem, "The Double Image":

> There was a church where I grew up
> with its white cupboards where they locked us up,
> row by row, like puritans or shipmates
> singing together. My father passed the plate.
> Too late to be forgiven now, the witches said.
> I wasn't exactly forgiven. They had my portrait
> done instead.

Her playful derangement of images is at the service of a narrative, the diary of an illness. Because of this, the issue of illness seems more at stake than the ego of the patient.

A few poems, like "The Truth the Dead Know," which opens *All My Pretty Ones*, succeed all the way through. But from the start of her career Sexton's poetry exhibited tendencies that detract even from her best work. She frequently begins with an arresting image or stanza, but fails to work out its implications in the rest of the poem. Particularly in the later books, the poems read like promising rough drafts that were left unfinished. Often her poems feel out a direction in sequences of short lyrics, a formal approach that highlights the arresting image at the expense of ideas or sustained dramas.

Transformations, her 1971 revision of traditional fairy tales, offered a reprieve from self-obsession. As Perrault's fairy tales are thinly-

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Spring *Love and Its Snares* — "Ostriches and Elephants," a long story by Kent Nelson; fiction by other hands; poetry by Neal Bowers, Paul Grant, X. J. Kennedy, Jayanta Mahapatra, Barry Sparks, George Woodcock, and others • Essays by George Bornstein, Edward L. Galligan, and Ben Howard

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disguised satires, Sexton's are playful correlatives of therapy—sexuality games. Middlebrook tells us that Sexton had been reading Vonnegut, and poems like "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," "Rapunzel" and "Cinderella" have some of Vonnegut's headlong satirical style, as well as a world-weary enchantment. The poems fall short when, like bad Vonnegut, they become too glib. Nevertheless, *Transformations*, coming relatively late in Sexton's career, suggested a way for her to broaden her range. The book became a libretto for Conrad Susa's successful opera, proving that there were several directions in which a poet with Sexton's talents might have gone. But while the intellectual and technical limitations of confessionalism weakened her art, everything else in her life pointed relentlessly to self-destruction.

In his "Foreword" to this biography, Dr. Orne asserts that he could have saved Anne Sexton. I wonder. Surely her prospects were weakened when, after leaving Orne's care, she began a long affair with another therapist. One friend of hers noted that "She couldn't cross the street without getting advice." She was a very sick person, a manic-depressive with powerful neuroses, living on and off Thorazine for the last eight years of her life, her purse a veritable druggist's armamentarium. She was kept afloat by the good will of others, until that good will was exhausted or overcome by her will to die.

Yet reading Middlebrook's book, one finds on page after page testimony to Sexton's vivaciousness. She attracted so many men and women, and in a few of the photographs here she seems as beautiful as their memories attest. But my prevailing sense on closing the book is of someone desperately clutching and clawing at life, one of those poor people on whom death has staked an early claim, so it's a wonder they live as long as they do. Middlebrook fails to make me understand why so many people were and are attracted to Anne Sexton. In fact, I wonder if Middlebrook wasn't herself a bit worn out by her subject. Of the later poetry she writes that "the poet had been survived by the performer."

There are enough felicitous observations in this biography to make me wish there had been more. Summing up Sexton's early crises in relation to her poetry, Middlebrook writes, "July 1960 marked the fourth anniversary of her first hospitalization—the normal length of a college education." I would have liked more of this, as well as a forceful vision of what Sexton's career means and has meant. Instead we have a cautious exposition of the life and work by someone who understands the issues involved but refuses to commit to them, one way or the other. Finally, Anne Sexton is one of too many American poets remembered less for the beauty or rightness of language than for the audacity of a botched life. She was an enormously talented writer who started late and never really found her way, and I wish Middlebrook's book had been better at showing us why.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

JAMES W. TUTTLETON,* Professor of English at New York University, is the author of *The Novel of Manners in America* and the editor of *Works of Washington Irving: History, Tales and Sketches* and *The Sweetest Impression of Life: The James Family and Italy*. In 1992 Cambridge University Press will publish his *American Critical Archives: Edith Wharton*. . . . HAROLD FROMM chaired a session, "Ecocriticism: The Greening of Literary Studies," at the last meeting of the Modern Language Association in San Francisco. . . . JAMES McCONKEY's most recent book, *Rowan's Progress*, is published by Pantheon Books. "Stories from My Life with the Other Animals" will give the title to the third volume of his *Court of Memory*, which David Godine will publish along with his original two volumes of memoirs, and another out-of-print book, *To a Distant Island*. . . . LOUIS SIMPSON has been writing his memoirs. *The King My Father's Wreck* is scheduled for publication in the fall. He was recently appointed Distinguished Professor of the State University of New York. . . . ROBERT SCHULTZ will be on sabbatical leave from Luther College next year, during which time he will be at work on a novel. . . . ANDREW HUDGINS' most recent book is *The Never-Ending: New Poems* (Houghton Mifflin). He teaches at the University of Cincinnati.

T.M. McNALLY's* first book, *Low Flying Aircraft* (University of Georgia Press), received the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction. His novel *Until Your Heart Stops* is forthcoming from Villard. . . . JOHN LOUGHERY, who has just been appointed a Contributing Editor of *The Hudson Review*, is a freelance writer and biographer. He is the author of *Alias S.S. Van Dine: The Man Who Created Philo Vance*, forthcoming from Charles Scribner's Sons. He is currently at work on a biography of the painter John Sloan to be entitled *An American Story*. . . . PATRICK LINDSAY BOWLES,* author of *Anglais chic anglais choc* (Flammarion), is completing a novel . . . . TOM WILHELMUS is Assistant Dean of Liberal Arts at the University of Southern Indiana. With Matthew Graham, he co-directs the RopeWalk Writers' Retreat. . . . GARY KRIST, who has just been appointed an Advisory Editor of *The Hudson Review*, is the author of *The Garden State*, a prize-winning collection of short stories, and a frequent contributor to these pages. . . . MARK JARMAN was co-winner of the 1991 Poets' Prize. His book-length poem, *Iris*, section I of which was published in *The Hudson Review*, Summer 1991, is soon to be brought out by Story Line Press. . . . DAVID MASON, author of *The Buried Houses* (Story Line Press), is currently translating the poetry of Yiorgos Chouliaras.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

The glorification of Flaming Youth, flappers and sheiks; of café society and slumming at the Harlem nightclubs; of bootleg whiskey and the later proliferation of grass, heroin, psychedelics, and cocaine; the stupefying adulation of the beats, hippies, rock stars, yuppies, and New Age freaks; the suggestive popular songs leading to pornographic lyrics; wild jazz dances leading to the copulative exhibitions on MTV; playboy and then playgirl sex (first sanctioned by the pill and now by school-distributed safe-sex condoms)—all of these social phenomena express, for [Lincoln] Collier, a hedonism that erupted in the 1920s and became triumphant by the 1960s, a decade that he calls "the end of morality."

—James W. Tuttleton, "How Much Is Enough?," p. 11.

Biocentrism, whether that of [Dave] Foreman or anyone else, is a position fraught with self-contradictions and absurdities, since all life feeds on other life and no life *except the human* has any regard for the preservation of anything but itself. Biocentrists eat, drive cars, use paper, step on ants, kill bodily invaders with antibiotics, and all the rest of it.

—Harold Fromm, "Ecology and Ideology," p. 23.

. . . I believe that an animal and a human sometimes do share identical attitudes toward an experience; that the animal can communicate such attitudes to a person through intimate eye contact as well as through body language; and that, once expressed, those attitudes can form the basis of a lifetime of understanding between the pair. As best as I can describe in words a communication that is wholly visual, the intelligence that passes from animal to human is based on humor and tolerance; it is as if the animal understands that he and his human companion are engaged in a friendly conspiracy.

—James McConkey, "Stories from My Life with the Other Animals," p. 37.

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